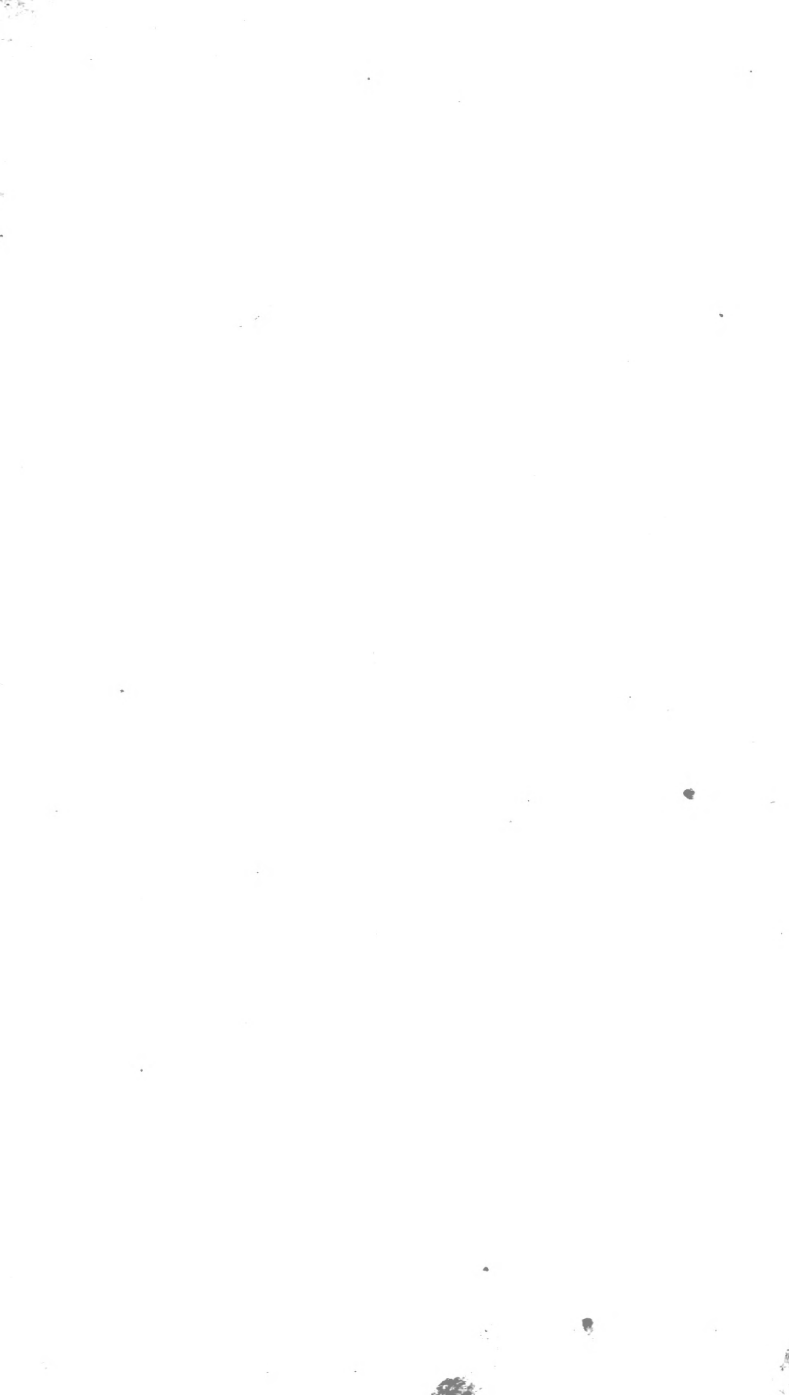


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MILDRED VERNON.

VOL. I.

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MILDRED VERNON;

A TALE OF PARISIAN LIFE

IN THE

LAST DAYS OF THE MONARCHY.

BY

HAMILTON MURRAY.

“ You're not a moral people, and you know it,
Without the aid of too sincere a poet.”

BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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P R E F A C E.

LET no one imagine that, because the following pages profess to treat of "Paris in the nineteenth century," the lines I have chosen for my epigraph are addressed to the French nation. They are *not* so, and are meant to be taken precisely in the sense given to them by their illustrious author. The morality or immorality of our continental neighbours, is but of small consequence to us; but of great import is it that we should know them better and judge of them more justly. All our faults come from our ignorance, and from our profound contempt of every thing "foreign." The travellers of every other nation seek, in the study of each different race, to decypher a fresh page of that endless volume, called the human heart; the English, on the contrary, travel to see sights, or rather, to *have seen* them. Some there are who, without looking upon travel as a sort of duty to be performed, wander the world over, in obedience to that uneasy

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longing for adventure entailed upon them by their Norman origin; but where are they who travel to *observe*? and what are the results of this voluntary ignorance? Ask the victims of it—and they are many.

We are a race more full of contradictory qualities and defects than perhaps any other that can be named. Formed by nature and by our institutions, both political and social, for the dignified retirement of our own homes, for the guardianship of our own fire-sides, we are, of all others, the most tormented by the unhealthy desire for change, by the ceaseless temptation to go abroad. There would be no harm in this, if we did not persist in carrying our England with us every where; but, as it is, we rush into the thick of the danger, utterly defenceless, literally devoid of every means of resistance, of every arm.

It is for this reason, that I have thought it might not be altogether without utility to put before the public a picture, the original of which, alas! I have but too often seen. Of Sir Edward Vernons, *we know*, the number is not small, for we are *not* more moral than our neighbours, and our ready enthusiasm and so-called “warm heart” make us an easier prey than most others to arts and wiles we know not of. The type of Madame de Cévèzes is, luckily, not to be found amongst us;

but for that very reason, perhaps, is she doubly dangerous.

In the education given to young men in England, too much is based upon that falsest of all false doctrines, the attainment of safety by a systematic flight from temptation. If young Englishmen never quitted their own country—if they were content to spend the “even tenour” of their whole existence between the virtuous monotony of their own homes, and the eventual honours attendant on the discussion of sugar duties and railway concessions in the House of Commons, the evils inherent to this system of education might, perhaps, never put forth their fruit; but, on the contrary, the greatest haste is almost universally shown to separate the victims of these “shallow devices” from those influences which alone can protect them. Thrown into the very centre of a world, to whose ways he is a stranger, of a society against whose arts he has no shield, an Englishman abroad—in France particularly—is placed in the position of a man who does not keep pistols for fear they should be turned against himself, and who, attacked by robbers in the night, falls without the possibility of a defence.

And now, my own dear countrymen, let me put to you, in all good faith and amity, the question whereof the epigraph of this book furnishes the answer. I have watched you abroad, (where you

do not appear to advantage), I have studied foreigners in *their* homes: you are the kindest, the most honourable, the surest, the most sincere—but *are* you the most *moral* of men? (I speak here of morality in its purely social sense, as affecting especially the ties of lover to mistress, of husband to wife). Certainly I should astonish, perhaps I might offend you, if I were to answer resolutely in the negative, and tell you that a well-born, well-educated Frenchman is,—for all the ends of that worldly dignity, of that official respectability, which serve as the exterior sign of good conduct,—a far more moral personage than yourselves. And why is this? Because you are *really* enthusiastic, and *really* full of heart, and that a well-behaved Frenchman has neither heart nor enthusiasm, but looks upon the first as a piece of insanity, and on the second as a piece of bad taste. Where are to be found those who are still, in our prosaic age, capable of committing what, on the continent, is styled *une folie*? In England, *but no where else*. There alone do men offer up everything on the altar of their inclinations; and actresses, dancers, and some even nameless fair ones, transformed, too often, into the representatives of the first titles of the land, speak sufficiently to the utter contempt felt by Englishmen for whatever obstacle prudence may oppose to passion. Now, this is not to be

defended without restriction ; for although, in a mere philosophical and speculative sense, it may be a glorious thing to see every worldly consideration sacrificed to a sentiment, yet the reckless kind of feeling which prompts this sacrifice to a legitimate object, may also produce, (*as it has done in more than one instance*), an equal sacrifice to an object wholly illegitimate and unworthy. When an Englishman is in love, he forgets everything ; with a Frenchman it is quite the contrary, and the whole is generally to him as much a matter of business as of pleasure, or, in the words of a witty parisian lady—“ *c'est moins une affaire de cœur qu'une affaire.*” The consequence is, that, if there are few *mariages d'inclination*, and still fewer *mésalliances d'amour* in France, there are, at least, none of those *esclandres* in which passion may account for, though it cannot excuse, public misconduct and a contempt of social laws ; or, if such *do* occur, they are visited with a universal reprobation that renders their effect rather beneficial than otherwise. A Frenchman, above all things, respects *les convenances*, and therefore, is pretty sure, sooner or later, to return to the track sanctioned by public opinion ; whereas, if an Englishman once sets *his heart* upon any object—whilst, in every other respect, he remains the very soul of uprightness and honour, the chances are as ninety-nine to one that he will

overleap every barrier, and trample on every obstacle, to effect the attainment of it.

“But then,” you will ask me, “why do the scandals of which you speak not occur more frequently, and what makes the British nation still preserve its character for morality above all others in the world?” I will tell you. Your own constitutional timidity, which induces you to hide the half of what you feel; and the innocent purity of English girls and English women. As long as you confine yourselves to your country, to the modest mirth and nature of your own happy homes, the doctrine of safety in flight from temptation may hold good, and keep you from harm; but *it is not enough*, believe me, when you exchange them for a social order of things, the merits of which you do not appreciate, and against the dangers of which you have no defence.

Nor will it suffice to include the whole population of the continental countries in one sentence of unmitigated blame—nothing can be really useful that is not *really true*—and when you shall, in your own minds, have set down the whole female race in France as lost to all sense of morality and virtue, you will be as far from the prevention of evil as from the truth! *All* the women in France are *not* immoral, but they *are* almost all, charming; and what is to be guarded

against is surprise, and a species of fascination of which you know too little, and which rarely, if ever, fails.

Several points of this book, I am aware, will necessarily call down upon the head of its author undisguised animadversion from the English reader; but, in my own profound conviction, I should not have conscientiously fulfilled what I look upon as a duty, had those points been otherwise. *The truth!*—that is what every one holding a pen owes to the public, to whom (in no matter how limited a proportion) he addresses himself, and, however flattering may be the conventional forms and ideas put forth to meet the exigencies of the general mass of readers—whatever degree of popularity they may ensure to the works in which they abound—the adoption of them, in preference to what he knows to be *the truth*, is a dereliction and an act of cowardice on the part of an author.

I shall perhaps be reproached with having depicted scenes of depravity either exaggerated or superfluous. In the first place, I answer that I have not described one single circumstance that has not its foundation in positive fact—and in the next, I repeat that the utility of such pictures lies entirely in their truth. That which *may* be dangerous should be known, and if, through a false

delicacy, you too absolutely abstain from the delineation of vice, by what means do you show its utter hideousness, and how can you sufficiently mark the abhorrence in which you hold it?

A certain degree of indignation will also probably be excited at the principles of indulgence towards the "*repentant fallen*" set forth in these pages, and imposed as a sacred duty upon all of our faith. Indulgence to the unfortunate is not a virtue much inculcated by the Protestant creed, and tolerance of the guilty has been too often and too lightly supposed to be an article of ours. How far this is from the reality they only can tell who are *of* this creed—and this alone have I endeavoured to show: that if in our faith, forgiveness of sin is ultimately to be obtained, it is not *given*, but dearly *bought*—and the price paid by the erring for that pardon which the Catholic religion awards to them on this earth, constitutes an amount of humility, of self-sacrifice, of resignation and of *genuine* repentance, such as, perhaps, few of their *virtuous* judges would feel inclined to pay.

I am also perfectly aware of the small sympathy that may be accorded to another character, the typical truth of which no one who has known anything of the French clergy will deny. I have never thought that true zeal for religion ought

by any means to necessitate an indiscriminate and blind belief in the virtues of its ministers; nor would I undertake to defend the priesthood of *all* Catholic countries; but of the clergy of France I have seen too much not to affirm openly that all praise must fall short of its deserts. The Catholic religion is so mixed up with the practical duties of existence, the intervention of our priests is so direct, their influence in almost every affair of our lives so undeniably great, that devotion, however ardent, however pure, is *not* all that is required from them; and, without great intelligence, learning, experience, and good sense, the exercise of their ministry would, in many cases, lead to results incompatible, to say the least, with the social exigencies of every-day existence. Herein lies the incontestible superiority of the French clergy. As wise as they are saintly, they know how to reconcile the most fervent and rigid piety with the discharge of every domestic duty, and no one who has lived long in France can hesitate to say that to their influence is owing whatever morality (in *our* sense of the word) is to be found in the country. I have watched them long and narrowly; unnoticed I have observed them, not alone in the discharge of their functions, but in the exercise of the more indirect influence acquired by their position in the domestic circle, and I have no

hesitation in saying that I never yet saw any but the most beneficial results arise from what I would style, their intimate intervention. The clergy of France may indeed say with truth, in the words of the Apostle: "*Vos testes estis et Deus, quam sanctè et juste et sine querela, vobis qui credidistis, fuimus : sicut scitis, qualiter unumquemque vestrum, sicut pater filios suos, deprecantes vos et consolantes, testificati sumus, ut ambularetis dignè Deo.*"*

At the same time, let me protest against the imputation of any presumptuous desire on my part to defend that which stands too high to need any defence. I have merely painted that which I have seen—that which I *know* to be true. The *truth* of the pictures they contain, is all I can vouch for in the following pages—for the rest, as in the old Spanish plays, I can only say—"Pardon the faults of the Author."

* When this was written, the martyrdom of the first Prelate of France had not yet set the seal of its sad confirmation to what I have said of the French clergy. Never has the ardent faith of the Church of France more luminously shone forth than in the way in which its ministers received the melancholy tidings of the Archbishop's death. The sure attainment of that glory to which a martyr may aspire, has moderated even the expression of regret, and amongst those who the most deeply lament the loss of their murdered pastor, the complete absence of all surprise convinces you that not one but would to-morrow, with the same serenity he displayed, consent to follow in his steps.

Paris, June, 1847.

ERRATA.

VOL. I.

Page 52, Line 21, *for* "instinctively feel will pass" *read* "fear will continue to pass".

Page 98, Line 19—20, *for* "Place Belle Chasse" *read* "Place du Palais Bourbon".

Page 298, Line 22, *for* "fixé" *read* "fixe".

Page 308, Line 2, *for* "Annecy" *read* "Andilly".

VOL. II.

Page 68, Line 23, *for* "Annecy" *read* "Andilly".

VOL. III.

Page 216, Line 1, *for* "the embassy" *read* "The ——— Embassy."



MILDRED VERNON.

CHAPTER I.

THE spring months of 1843 saw more visitors throng round the doors of the Odéon than have ever since disturbed the solitude of the deserted edifice. The din of carriages made echo lively in the studious Rue Mazarine, and the solemn, aristocratic, legitimist stillness of the melancholy Faubourg St. Germain was ruthlessly broken in upon by the fame of M. Ponsard's *Lucrèce*. Foreigners from all countries undertook the weary task of migrating to the precincts of the Luxembourg; and even the English (the most careless of any, where a purely literary question is involved) magnanimously sacrificed one out of the three or four

dozen Mondays and Thursdays they had mentally consecrated to the Duchesse Decazes, and, profiting by the habit and the neighbourhood, stopped at the Odéon, instead of at the Grand Referendary's.

A week had scarcely passed since the first representation of *Lucrèce*. In one of the largest of the open boxes, which form the first tier of the theatre, was assembled a party of French people ; in the smaller box next to them, sat an English lady and a gentleman, alone. The first scene was not yet ended, and Madame Dorval had just uttered the words :

“ La maison d’une épouse est un temple sacré,
Où même le soupçon ne *soit* jamais entré.”

“ Well !” said the little Baroness de Cévèzes, in an under tone—“ that is very moral, but it is not French.”

“ Hush,” answered the young man to whom the remark was addressed, and who was leaning familiarly on the back of the Baroness’s chair ; “ wait till the act is over.”

And when the act was over, the discussion commenced. After a lengthened comparison

of the merits of Ponsard and Victor Hugo—each finding zealous advocates,

“Do you mean to defend the *probability* of this play?” enquired Madame de Cévèzes.

“Why, history”

“*Ah, bah!* Marquis, pray do not be pedantic. Will you tell me that you believe in the story of Lucretia?” and the Baroness fixed upon her antagonist one of her archest glances.

“Truth on the stage,” began the Marquis, “is of two kinds, the positive and the relative. Now *Lucrèce* in this instance—”

Madame de Cévèzes waxed impatient—“Do not make me lose my temper,” exclaimed she; “but just be so good as to tell me, M. de Renneville, do you look upon the truth of the story M. Ponsard has chosen, as so incontrovertible that you should therefore call all others improbable?”

The Marquis was evidently embarrassed at being thus placed between his wish to defend *Lucrèce*, and his desire not to seem unmindful of certain old traditions, in virtue of which some men of his age in France appear to regard as a positive affront to the whole female sex, the

belief in the proper conduct of any member of it.

“ Well !” said the Baroness, “ will you answer me ? Do you believe that”

“ *Ma foi, oui !*” replied Monsieur de Renneville in despair, “ *c’étaient des temps fabuleux.*”

A good deal of laughter followed this speech, and as the curtain drew up for the second act, the English lady, who had listened with dismay to the end of the conversation, turned upon her neighbours in the next box the same kind of look with which an Arab is usually pleased to take his survey of a Jew.

Madame la Baronne de Cévèzes was, in her way, a remarkable person ; and decidedly worth the trouble of looking at. She had reached her twenty-second or twenty-third year, and might have passed for a child of fourteen. Purer than an apple-blossom was the fine transparency of her skin, bluer than the heavens in June, the deep azure of her eyes. On that youthful brow, beaming through the braids of her wavy chestnut hair, there seemed such a promise of purity—the dewy freshness of her ripe lips was parted by such constant dimpling smiles, that

to all but those who knew her, the idea of corruption, connected with such a being, seemed absurd ; and yet corruption, and that of the worst kind, had its abode under the sweet witcheries of that most treacherous semblance.

Dressed with almost infantine simplicity, half enshrouded by the pendant lace of her plain white silk *capote*, with nothing about her to attract attention save a bouquet of choice flowers, there was in Aurélie de Cévèzes a certain charm of youthful freshness that gladdened you like the approach of spring. One charm, however, she wanted, the magic of the voice. Hers was harsh, hoarse, and grating to the ear ; and when from that child-like mouth you heard issuing such tones, and when those tones conveyed such sentiments as Aurélie would not seldom utter, surprise and horror would make you start from her, as Faust from the shade of Gretchen, when the red mouse escapes her lips.

Of M. de Cévèzes, little was known, except that Mademoiselle de Vallemer had been married to him for the last four years, and that, for the last three, he had been attached to different

embassies and legations, always at the farthest possible distances from France. Aurélie had been brought up at an excellent school for diplomacy (not to say intrigue) of all kinds. Her mother, the Marquise de Vallemer, had presided over the destinies of more than one cabinet; and more than one prime minister had, in her younger days, given up to her the secrets of his heart and of his office; of the last mentioned of which she is reported to have made considerable use. Having provided for her sons, and lost her eldest daughter, Aurélie became the sole object of care to her mother, who one day announced to her circle of friends that M. de Cévèzes would shortly become her son-in-law. The clever Marchioness, to whom her daughter's disposition was not the matter of a moment's thought, conceived that nothing further could be expected from her in the way of maternal duty, now that she had provided Aurélie with a husband whose good birth, fortune, and personal insignificance were on a par.

As to the daughter herself, the whole was to her a mere ceremony void of sense. Indifferent to M. de Cévèzes before marriage, she

was doubly so afterwards; and when, through her mother's still lasting influence, she had succeeded in virtually separating herself from her husband, she never appeared to advert to him again, in thought, in word, or in deed: seriously compromised in reputation, she had never evinced any particular attachment even for those in whose behalf she had forfeited her good name; but as she was one of the reigning sovereigns of fashion, as she stood foremost in the ranks of the most celebrated *lionnes*, it was deemed right and proper to be mentioned as her admirer.

At the time we allude to, the Vicomte de Moreton divided the sceptre with this capricious queen; but this *liaison* was looked upon by the world with somewhat less of favour than many others. The Vicomte was married, and Madame de Moreton was so universally esteemed, that on several occasions the Baroness (whose temper but ill brooked such rebukes) was made to feel that she had gone *un peu trop loin*. However, as M. de Moreton was determined to run all risks sooner than give up the object of his guilty love, and as his desperate violence of character rendered him no easy person to

discard, Aurélie allowed him to continue his adoration of her, and even permitted him, in some degree, to scare away all other swains.

As to the other occupants of the box, a few words will tell you what they were : Madame Ferrières, a *young woman* of, it might be, forty or thereabouts, decidedly handsome, and with great pretensions to *esprit*, was the wife of a general officer, who had once been minister for six months, and who might be so again, and that at any moment. He was one of those convenient individuals who, having risen to a certain necessary rank, unembarrassed by talent, convictions, or party engagements, are ready for every eventuality, and fitted to any combination. His wife, whose ruling passion was literature, had taken advantage of her husband's short possession of office, to wheedle sanguine publishers into buying her manuscripts, under promise of allowing her name to be printed at full length on the title page ; nor was she unmindful of the ministerial Press ; and, in this way the General's ministry, if it did not bring any extraordinary advantage to the department of the State over which he ruled, brought, at

least to Madame Ferrières, pleasure, profit, and renown.

Of M. de Renneville, and M. Lebrun, little need be said ; except that they were exactly the sort of men whom people do usually ask *to fill up a box* (the real meaning of which is, that they are to be attentive and polite, to talk when the curtain is down, and be content to see nothing when it is up) ; and for this, and sundry other similar favours, ingeniously repeated during the course of the year, they are expected in Paris to shower down half their income, in the shape of *bonbons*, at the feet of their fair patronesses, upon the return of every New Year's day.

The discussion had gone on between the second and third acts in a literary strain ; principally kept alive by Madame Ferrières, who, as an authoress, arrogated to herself the right of pronouncing in all cases, such as Ponsard against Hugo. A few minutes before the commencement of the fourth act, M. de Renneville was disturbed by the opening of the box door against which he was leaning, and the exclamation of—"Ah, Gaston !"—from M. de Moreton,

turned the attention of the whole party towards the new comer. The first habitual greetings exchanged:—

“A pretty time, forsooth,” remarked the stranger, “you have chosen to be disputing about the merits of two rival rhymesters, when I bring you news that will confound you, every one, and that to-morrow will make Paris ring. Only think, Madame de Cévèzes,” added he, addressing the Baroness,—“news that *no one knows* !”

“What is it ?”—“Make haste !”—“Tell us at once.”—“Abd-el-Kader ?”—“Mademoiselle Rachel ?”—“Fiammetta ?”—“*Le Ministère* ?” burst from five mouths at once, mingling interrogatively names of actresses, horses, and politicians.

“Madame de Boislambert has eloped !”

At these words the tumult increased, and almost unheeding the subdued tone of voice prescribed by good breeding in a public theatre, each person gave vent to his or her astonishment.

“*Mon Dieu* !” said Madame Ferrières.

“*Diable* !” murmured the Vicomte.

“When ?” asked M. de Renneville.

"How?" demanded M. Lebrun.

"Who with?" exclaimed the Baroness.

"With nobody,"—replied he whom we have called Gaston; "but that is not *her* fault."

"If you had given me ten years' law, I never should have guessed her, as the heroine of such an adventure," rejoined Madame Ferrières.

"But tell us the whole history,"—cried the Baroness eagerly.

"Why,—here is the romance, since you insist upon it. Only conceive that, this morning at seven o'clock, Lionel Chavigny—"

"What, the banker?"

"The man whose horse won last Sunday at the Champs de Mars?"

"No! no! you mean a dark, handsome-looking fellow, who began by giving six thousand francs a month to Florinde—"

"Chavigny was awakened by a violent ringing at his bell, and surprised, a moment later, to see his valet-de-chambre rush into his room, and hear him announce the visit of a lady who was so thickly veiled that no one could see her face, but who said she must instantly speak to M. Chavigny. After making a rapid toilette,

Chavigny hastened to receive the *incognita*, when, judge of his astonishment, he found Madame de Boislambert !”

“Astonishment indeed !” exclaimed the Baroness. “Why, the thing has been evident for the last six weeks. At the last ball at the Austrian Embassy he never left her an instant ; and at the reception at the Hotel de Ville last Saturday they were perfectly absurd. As to *that* part of the affair, all Paris knew it ; but I confess I thought it was a mere *amourette*, for I *did* suppose that Madame de Boislambert was too well-born to run away with a man whose father was an *agent de change*.”

“I should not have dreamt of her running away with any one,” said Madame Ferrières ; “her reputation was so unimpeachable.”

“Well, Gaston,” added the Vicomte, “for Heavens’ sake, finish your story.”

“There was Madame de Boislambert, at seven o’clock in the morning, in Chavigny’s apartment ! and as to his astonishment being *real*, the sequel will prove that. It appears that her first words were : ‘Oh ! Lionel, I have sacrificed every thing for you !’”

“Pleasant!” muttered the Vicomte.

“So thought Chavigny, as it seems; for he started back in dismay, and grew still more terrified, when he heard these ominous expressions followed up by the announcement of the lady’s plans. Every word of nonsense her *adornateur* had ever uttered to her, she had believed; and, after a considerable deal of reasoning and reflection, had determined to leave her husband and children, and fly to Italy with Chavigny. Boislambert was absent since yesterday, and not likely to return for a week; and she hoped to be at Milan, or at Venice, before any thought of pursuit could be entertained.”

“Yes,” interrupted the Baroness, “I suppose M. Chavigny had been talking to her about gondolas, and the Adriatic, and ‘*la solitude à deux*,’ and all that kind of absurdity. Well! and where are the happy couple now?—on the road to Lyons?”

“On the contrary; they are in Paris—at least one of them is. Chavigny may be found at any hour between five in the morning and three in the day, at his apartment in the Rue Taitbout;

but as for *la Marquise*, no one knows where she is."

"Probably in her own house in the Rue de l'Université," remarked M. de Moreton, "where she will quietly await the coming of events, and of the excellent M. de Boislambert."

"You are out there, Armand," replied the relater of the tale. "She had a violent scene with Chavigny, who talked reason to her, tried to persuade her to return to her home, and positively declined the responsibility of running away with her. She declared that she would leave France for ever, and that nothing should induce her, after the step she had taken, to re-enter her husband's doors."

"But," pursued the Baroness, "how did he contrive to get rid of her?"

"By telling her, I suppose, that his health, or his purse, would not permit him to take such a long journey," remarked the Vicomte, with a sneer.

"I really do not know how he managed matters in that respect," continued Gaston; "but I know that he is greatly annoyed by the whole affair. He went directly to consult two of his

intimate friends on the occasion ; one of whom related it all to me, not three quarters of an hour ago."

"Poor fellow ! I really pity him !" said the kind-hearted Baroness.

"*Diable!*" cried M. de Moreton, laughing ; "he *must* have been astonished when he saw his *innamorata* ! What visions of trunks, band-boxes, cap-cases, couriers, *femmes-de-chambre*, *douaniers*, and musquitoes, must have passed through his head, at the bare idea of a journey to Italy under such circumstances !"

"Well, I am not quite certain whether — but hush"—and Gaston stopped short in whatever he was going to observe ; "let me listen to the play ; a touch of *Lucrèce* after all this will be refreshing."

During the whole of the fifth act, the English lady and her companion cast sundry side-glances at their neighbours ; but, as it appeared, from totally different motives. She never entirely surmounted the kind of dread that was visibly mingled with her curiosity ; whereas a spectator would have said that, far from shrinking from the impure contact, her companion seemed

rather to derive from it pleasure, undeniable though strange. Once or twice, however, the lady's looks did rest with a certain degree of complacency upon the stranger called Gaston. And well, in truth, they might; for a more striking, or a nobler figure has seldom met the eye. It was not even so much the beauty of the face (though that was handsome enough to have rendered every other attribute superfluous) which commanded attention, as the easy elegance, the proud, aristocratical grace of the bearing. There was a something almost royal about him, that would have betrayed him — as Queen Mary's hand did her—in the garb of a peasant.

At the end of the piece, while M. de Moreton was arranging *the* shawl, the folds of which it was his duty to superintend, Madame de Cévèzes turned round to Gaston :

“*A propos* though, to this affair,” remarked she, “you were saying, when the curtain last drew up, that you were not quite certain of something—to what was it you alluded?”

“Oh! nothing. I merely meant to say, that I was not quite certain whether Chavigny's conduct could be excused.”

“Why, you would not have had the unhappy man exile himself for the sake of Madame de Boislambert?”

“Humph! I do not see how, consistently with honour”—

“Bah! what has honour to do with such matters?” exclaimed the Baroness.

“Little enough, I fear; still, Chavigny’s was the only name that had ever been coupled with hers!”

“Everything must have a beginning,” laughed Madame de Cévèzes.

“That is possible; but it is for Chavigny that she will have sacrificed all; it is really he who is responsible.”

“Oh, my dear fellow!” yawned the Viscount, “*if it had not been he, it would have been some one else*; and if he had been fool enough to leave the world for her, she would have left him for another lover before a year!”

Gaston made a slight gesture, clearly implying that the justice of this argument could not be denied, and the party moved on, leaving their neighbours of the next box surprised in an equal degree, though evidently from a totally different cause.

CHAPTER II.

THE lady and gentleman whom we have seen far more attentive to their neighbour's conversation than to M. Ponsard's tragedy, were an English Baronet and his wife, Sir Edward and Lady Vernon, who had arrived in Paris, for the first time, two days before: a young married couple, who had started early in the winter of the preceding year, from the classical haven of St. George's Hanover Square, to navigate on the fitful sea of matrimony. Such excellent advice had been given to them by such excellent people; so many sermons had been preached by so many respectable relations, the whole tending to include the *Continent* in one sweeping sentence of reprobation, that the young

husband and his still younger wife, being essentially proper and well-brought-up people, looked towards the opposite shore of the channel with the sly longing of our first parents for the apple, and contented themselves with wishing through a whole twelvemonth in their own country.

At last, having shot, dined, and hunted through two winters, and danced, breakfasted, and bustled through one entire London season (without counting a month of sea-bathing at Ryde, in the autumn,) the temptation became too strong, and on the 15th of April 1843, Sir Edward Vernon proposed to his wife, to fly boldly in the face of the interdict laid upon them, and repair at once to that pit of darkness and abomination, to that Gomorrah and Babylon of the righteous—to Paris. Lady Vernon agreed, and on the 23rd of the same month a handsome travelling-carriage, emblazoned with the Vernon arms, rolled over the diabolical pavement of that busy, brilliant city which certain *rococo* Frenchmen still persist in erroneously styling *le Paradis des femmes*.

Mildred Egerton was the daughter of a Westmoreland squire, or rather of a man whose

grandfather having married a north-country heiress, had emigrated from one of the midland counties, and established his definitive home near the lakes. The wealth of the original settler had gone on increasing with each successive generation, so that Mr. Egerton, Mildred's father, was justly looked upon as one of the greatest land-owners and richest country gentlemen in the north. The only thing that was ever known to disturb his equanimity, was the circumstance of having no heir. This did occasion him considerable and constant vexation, and after the birth of Mildred, he allowed Mrs. Egerton to perceive, too plainly perhaps, how bitter was his disappointment at the unlucky sex of the child.

Hurt, on the one hand, at having no heir to his name, in a country where, although newly established, his riches had given him weight, and where antiquity of race and purity of blood is proverbial ; exposed in his home to every petty annoyance that can be invented by a pious and *virtuous* wife, whose sour temper only serves to make virtue disagreeable, and piety odious ; poor Mr. Egerton had recourse to the panacea of the

Borderers, and died at forty-seven, from a too liberal use of rum and water. The grave, however, did not close on him before he had had time to obviate, as much as in him lay, the failure of male heirs to his name, by making a will, in which his brother's son, Philip Egerton of Braith, in the county of Lancashire, became possessor of all his landed estates, and of all his funded property, save and except, the very handsome portion of forty thousand pounds to his only child. Mildred, at this period, had but just completed her twelfth year, and whatever counteraction her mother's austere method of education might have met with in her father's good-nature, that counteraction necessarily ceased at his death, and Mildred became the docile disciple of Mrs. Egerton, and the victim of her misdirected zeal.

When *young* Philip Egerton, as he was called, (he was then past thirty-three) received the news of his uncle's death, and of his own sudden accession of fortune thereby, he left Vienna, where the news reached him, and hastened to Westmoreland. He was met at the widow's by his own mother, and with her again

left the north, after a ten days' visit, declaring that no consideration should induce him to inhabit, unless as a guest, a house (which was now his own) during his aunt's lifetime and until the marriage of his cousin.

Here then was destroyed Mildred's last chance of contemplating, by however small a chink, the great world from which she was shut out, or of varying in any degree the monotony of her life.

She arrived at the age of eighteen without any consciousness of her beauty, which was remarkably great, and without any discontent at her mode of life, which was dreary enough. If Mildred had been an imaginative person, if she had possessed that vivid poetical sense that can brighten every common-place occurrence of life, and that all-absorbing love of nature that is the only real and profound passion of many a heart, she would certainly have had no right to complain. On the hazel-fringed banks of the deep blue lakes, on the purple-mantled, heather-clad Fells, she would have found that delight which alone never cloy, that resource which alone never fails. But Mildred was *not* a poetical

person ; she was on the contrary, to the full extent of the term, what has been called *serious*, and followed demurely the matter-of-fact paths of every day *existence*.

The autumn wind, as it moaned through the dark pine trees on Whinfell, brought no sound to her ears, as from an unknown sphere ; the sun, as it set behind Helvellyn, spreading a dais of gold over the hills, brought no ray of sudden warmth to Mildred's heart, nor quickened within her the sense of the Infinite. It was not that her nature had resisted any attempt at this sort of mental cultivation, but that no such attempt had been made.

She grew up into a woman under her mother's eye, and was in character more near to forty than to eighteen. Still, although she had nearly all Mrs. Egerton's opinions, she had but few of her defects. Although she inclined to anathematize (as it was highly proper she should do) all those who did not walk unflinchingly on the thorny road of virtue, yet there was something about her that seemed to say this harshness was at variance with her real nature ; and, unlike her mother, there was in

her way of administering actual and material charity, an ardour that betrayed an unconscious delight, at finding amongst her fellow-creatures, some, at least, to whom she might allow herself to be kind. Mildred was as illiberal in her ideas as it was well possible to be ; nay more, she was narrow-minded, inasmuch as that of all things she saw but *one* side, and would never have imagined that it was admissible to view the same question under two different aspects. With her, right and wrong were absolute, never relative.—It was *the* right and *the* wrong, and not a little of each, counterbalancing and neutralising the other. She was what the French term *toute d'une pièce*, and fell into the grievous error of believing in the entire perfection of the apparently righteous, and in the eternal perdition of those who had committed *one* fault. Pitiless, inexorable for the latter, she could not admit the existence of amiability apart from the most exalted virtue, nor was virtue itself quite indubitable in her eyes, if unaccompanied by its guardian, severity.

One morning at breakfast (shortly after Mildred had completed her eighteenth year)

Mrs. Egerton received a letter from a former friend of her own, whom she had not seen above four or five times in the course of twenty years. Lady Augusta Danvers announced that, in a few weeks, she purposed making a tour of the Lakes, on her road to Scotland, and hoped, if Mrs. Egerton did not refuse to receive an old school companion, to rest for some days at the Larches. She was to travel with her husband, the Hon. Mr. Danvers, and a young Baronet, Sir Edward Vernon, to whom Mr. Danvers had acted as guardian till within the last two years, and in whose favour her Ladyship solicited an extension of Mrs. Egerton's hospitality. Sir Edward was going to visit a relation in Scotland, and would probably not stay longer than one or two days at the Larches.

Whether Mrs. Egerton was pleased with this piece of intelligence is not known; but Lady Augusta was so highly respectable a person, that it was impossible to do otherwise than accept her offer with every semblance of joy and even gratitude. She was, therefore, in the answer she received, requested to bear in mind

that she must consent to remain more than a 'few days' at the Larches, and that a fortnight or three weeks was the shortest term that her hostess would fix to so agreeable a visit.

Every one, however good and worthy he or she may be, bears somewhere the marks of contact with what is called the world. Far more disagreeable are the failings of those who live alone ; far greater their vanities, far more monstrous their selfishness ; but on the other hand, worldliness will show itself inevitably, no matter in how small or how hidden a manner, in the very best of those whose home is in the world. The worldliness of Lady Augusta Danvers lay in a quiet kind of avarice, controlled by her sense of her position, and by her good taste and good breeding. Since Lady Augusta's marriage, for example, she had never spent the autumn and winter months any where but in the houses of her friends. When she received Mrs. Egerton's letter, therefore, she resolved instantaneously to conform to the wish it expressed, and secretly agreed with herself

(however dull she felt sure it would be) to extend the 'fortnight or three weeks'—to a month.

Early in September, the visitors arrived ; and Mildred saw this unexpected diversion to her daily *tête-à-tête* take place, without evincing, or even feeling, the slightest annoyance or delight. After a few days had passed, however, she really did begin to feel considerable pleasure in the society of Lady Augusta ; it was a still, imperceptible, sort of pleasure, but pleasure it certainly was. Mrs. Egerton, to do her justice, notwithstanding her puritanical notions, had not neglected her daughter's education, and Mildred was, in her way, as accomplished as most girls of her age.

In the society of her mother's guest, Mildred found an undiscovered charm. Lady Augusta's reputation was such, that Miss Egerton felt obliged to look up to and respect her ; at the same time, she heard her constantly speaking of a world with which she had hitherto thought it pollution to mingle. This, while it took off the distrust which similar discourses in any other mouth might have awakened, still led her on

to listen to, nay, even to become interested in, persons and things, the very existence of which was before unknown to her. The presence of Sir Edward, too, who did *not* go to Scotland, but awaited at the Larches the departure of his friends, far from alarming Mildred, seemed to help still further to draw her out, and certainly diffused over the circle assembled at Mrs. Egerton's a tone of gaiety utterly foreign to the austere habits of the house. When the handsome young Baronet left Westmoreland, it was with a warmer feeling of admiration for Miss Egerton than he had himself suspected; and strange to say, of the two, the separation did not perhaps cause him the greater pain.

The following year Sir Edward Vernon returned; and a note dated Penrith, requested the favour of a few moments' conversation with Mrs. Egerton.

"I feel," said he, "that I am adopting a course that ill accords with custom upon such occasions; but I also feel that my own peace of mind requires it imperiously, and, therefore, before I go further, I must be sure of your support. I have seen enough of Miss Egerton

to be aware that everything must depend on your consent—would you yield it to a union between your daughter and myself? Is she free to choose, and have I your permission to try to influence her choice in my favour?"

Mrs. Egerton was too much flattered by this act of deference to refuse, and was not a little touched at the thought of her daughter becoming the wife of one of the earliest English Baronets, with twenty thousand a year, and a family estate dating from King John.

Sir Edward Vernon, however, once assured of meeting with no obstacle on Mrs. Egerton's part, had determined to let the official courtship cease there, and play out the rest of the game in his own way. This, he thought, would be no very easy task, for Mildred never left her mother's side when visitors of the male sex were present, and he knew Mrs. Egerton too well to suppose that she would institute an exception in his favour, even under the present circumstances. He contented himself therefore with begging that the motive of his visit might be kept an entire secret from Miss Egerton, and took his leave, promising to return to the

Larches, at the end of the week, after a visit he was forced to pay near Carlisle.

A month's residence under the same roof renders people pretty well acquainted with one another's domestic habits, and Sir Edward recollected that one of Mildred's had been to resort every evening, after dinner, to a certain spot in the park, out of sight of the house, where, under the shade of a wide-spreading plane tree, she used to ponder over the pages of her book. There was Mildred; seated, as heretofore, on the old rustic bench; and, screened by a thick group of shrubs behind, Sir Edward could see every movement of her very eyelashes as she turned her head towards his hiding-place. Strange to say, though a book was on her knee, it was unopened, and for nearly a quarter of an hour, that he left her undisturbed, her hand never sought to unfold its contents. She seemed wrapt in thought, but not in the kind of thought that indicates calm or studious reflection. No! there was a vagueness in her look as it wandered over the different objects around her, that would rather—if such a thing had been possible—have

shown that she was lost in a day-dream. The rustling of the branches near aroused her, and Sir Edward Vernon, hat in hand, stood before her. "This proves ill for my topographical memory, Miss Egerton," said he laughing. "I have been walking round by Yanwath, and was endeavouring to regain the town by crossing the fields, when I found myself at an open gate, that I ought to have recognised, and through which I came hither, little thinking to disturb your studies."

Mildred was so great a novice that it was impossible for her to disguise her emotion at the sudden appearance of Sir Edward. She could not—had she tried better than, in her ignorance, she was capable of doing—she could not have concealed the crimson flush upon her cheek, the rapid beating of her heart, the uncontrollable tremor of her voice. She had been more affected than she was aware of by the idea that he had revisited, and left the Larches, without expressing a single wish to see her; and, although the feeling had not been one of positive pain, it had approached nearly enough to it to make that excited by his re-ap-

pearance, one of pure, unequivocal delight. All this was revealed to Sir Edward at a glance, and he lost no time in taking advantage of it.

An hour—the happiest hour of Mildred's hitherto solitary life, was spent under that wide-spreading tree, and the sun had sunk to rest, leaving only the last pale rays of his retreating light upon the grass, before the lovers thought of leaving the enchanted spot. At length, Sir Edward, drawing Mildred's arm within his own, began slowly to wend his way towards the house; and it is recorded of him that, in the overflowing of his joy, he actually kissed Mrs. Egerton. He did not, however, neglect to repeat to the astonished matron the story of his having lost his way, which Mildred, for her part, implicitly believed, and for which she unconsciously, and in her innocence, thanked Heaven,—who as we know, had little enough to do in the affair.

Mildred's wedding was fixed to take place in six months, and Sir Edward was admitted as an accepted lover. But in the mean time, Mrs. Egerton died of a cold caught one day, while disputing in the rain with a poor Catholic

woman who asked alms of her. This event not only postponed the marriage, but necessarily separated the bride and bridegroom.

The year of mourning was spent by Mildred at the Larches, under the care of her aunt, the mother of Philip Egerton ; whilst he himself, the master of the domain, only visited it at intervals, and for only a very few days together. Miss Egerton grieved, as in duty bound, for her parent ; but Mrs. Egerton was too unlovable a person for even the most pious daughter to regret with that sorrow that knows no healing.

The honeymoon was spent at Sir Edward's place in Buckinghamshire, amongst the beautiful box-wooded dells of the Chiltern Hills ; and then commenced a series of visits to different relatives and friends. During the following London season, — of all the gaieties of which Lady Vernon, to please her husband, partook, the inexperienced and prejudiced country girl, if very few of her opinions were radically altered, learned at least the outward manners of the world, and dropped some few of her austere observances. For instance, Lady Vernon no longer thought

it a crime to dance, though she absolutely refused to waltz with any one but her husband : she consented to occupy her box at the Opera, and even allowed herself to be amused at the French play, on such nights as the performance happened to be fitted for a lady's ear. She had gained in a year of married life, passed in the midst of society, enough knowledge of things, as they really were, to counteract the baneful effects of some of the worst and most dispiriting portions of her mother's false system of education. Her youth, her great beauty, and her natural elegance, made her an object of general admiration ; whilst her conduct and her reputation for strictness, both in morals and piety, ensured her universal respect. Warmly attached to her husband, whose pride in his wife seemed manifest, nothing appeared wanting to the happiness of the fair Lady Vernon.

Of Sir Edward we have said little, because little in truth there seemed to say. He was, at five-and-twenty, (the period of his marriage) what most young men are at that age. Left in childhood an orphan, with a fine name, and

a still finer fortune, he had passed (under the guardianship of the Hon. Mr. Danvers) from Eton to Cambridge, and from Cambridge to the great school of the world, without, in either, distinguishing himself from the herd. He was a perfectly gentleman-like, well-educated young man; full of good nature and good heart, which shone forth, right or wrong, upon all occasions, and he was, therefore, supposed to be amply stored with good principles, which no one ever put to the test. Exceedingly handsome, he had the decided merit of being neither affected nor vain.

He had, however, unknown to himself, and in common with too many of his countrymen, one failing: that of yielding too easily to the attraction of the moment, without examining from whence it sprung, or calculating whither it might lead. The first charm that Sir Edward Vernon found in Mildred Egerton, was that of novelty. She held, in his opinion, the position of a nun, to whom earthly sentiments were forbidden; and this only made him the more anxious to win her.

Mildred had spent but forty-eight hours in

Paris, and she had already heard things which, to her mind, were crimes not even to be named, spoken of as of every day occurrence ; worse ! she had heard a young and beautiful woman disclaiming virtue as an attribute of her sex, and almost the first French tongue whose accents had met her ear, had given utterance to the fatal principle upon which, in France, the whole system of social relationships is based : the belief in the inevitability of sin, and the disbelief in the individuality of affection. “ *Moi ou un autre ;* ”—there is the death-blow to the morality and honour of social France. With the belief in woman’s purity, is lost the respect without which she is deprived of one of her incentives to virtue. With the disbelief in the sacrifice come the ingratitude and the dishonour.

CHAPTER III.

THE first impression produced on Lady Vernon by the conversation she had overheard at the Odéon, was, as many first impressions are, an erroneous one, or rather, was based upon an erroneous foundation. She was more alarmed by the effect than by the cause ; more shocked at the existence of actual guilt, such as she heard described, than at the profound corruption of public opinion which was the hidden fountain whence flowed each single guilty fact.

On returning to their apartment in the *Hôtel Bristol*, Lady Vernon asked her husband if he did not think Paris much too dreadful a place to remain in, and if he did not agree

with her that, as soon as they had seen all the sights, (which they might contrive to do in a week) it would be far better to leave it and return to England.

Sir Edward laughed. "Really, Mildred," said he, "you are too puritanical. There are what you call improper people everywhere, and even in England you will not go through life without being exposed to hear of women running away from their husbands; but as there is no danger of your following their example," (and Sir Edward drew his wife towards him and imprinted a kiss upon her cheek) "I do not see why you need be alarmed."

Lady Vernon ventured on a very few words more; but as her husband's wishes to her were a law, and as she saw that he really wished to stay, she quickly gave up her point, and resigned herself to make the best of her forced sojourn in the sinful capital of Gaul.

Among the letters of introduction the travellers had brought to Paris, was one to the Duchesse de Montévieux, a still reigning star of the aristocratical Faubourg St. Germain. The letter had been sent, and cards exchanged, and the

Duchess, having called on Lady Vernon without meeting her, had left a charming note, written, as only a Frenchwoman can write, begging for the pleasure of Sir Edward and Lady Vernon's company to dinner at the Hôtel Montévieux on the following Wednesday.

It was Sunday, and two days only were left for Mildred to prepare a *toilette* that might stand the scrutiny of one of the most critical circles in Paris; for the fame of the Duchess's *salon* had already reached the ears of her intended guests. The result, however, was admirable, and Mildred had never in her life looked lovelier. A white *moire*, of which the thick folds hung heavy as the damask robes of our grandmothers, showed off her slight and somewhat bending figure; half concealed amid the rich spirals of her dark and lustrous hair, was a water-lily, fresh from the *atelier* of Constantin, whilst its sister-blossom drooped gracefully on her bosom, and joined together the two ends of a splendid *berthe* of *point d'Alençon*, made to match the costly trimmings of her dress.

When Sir Edward and Lady Vernon were

announced, the Duchess advanced half way to meet them; and, conducting Mildred by the hand into the midst of the small circle formed at the upper end of the room, seated herself immediately by the side of her new guest.

“We should be great friends, Lady Vernon,” said she, “for Sir Edward’s father and M. de Montévieux were in habits of daily intimacy. Poor, dear Sir John! he contributed to render Hartwell charming to us all; and nothing could surpass the consideration in which he was held by the King.”

“Ah Madame!” exclaimed a little old man, whose scrupulously-powdered head showed he could belong to no other than to the old *régime*, “your father-in-law had the honour to be distinguished by the King, my master. What a sad thing for you to visit Paris under such different circumstances. Things are so altered that—”

“*Allons*, M. le Duc!” gaily interrupted Madame de Montévieux, “do not let us talk politics, you will frighten our new friend, and make her think that Paris is no better

than it was in the days of the Revolution ; whereas, I hope she will find that there are still some, (and not a few) places of refuge, where the traditions of other times are preserved, and where things remain pretty much as they were in the reign of Louis XVI."

At this moment, the opening of a door behind the sofa on which Mildred was seated, admitted a fresh addition to the party.

"Gaston," said the Duchess, to this new comer, "come here, that I may present you to Lady Vernon. Sir Edward—my son."

Mildred could not help blushing, as she looked up and saw in the young Duc de Montévieux, the handsome narrator of the history of Madame de Boislambert. She felt confused and alarmed, lest M. de Montévieux should recognise in her, a person whose ears, upon that occasion, had been polluted by words such as no woman ought ever to have heard. A few more guests arrived, and during the remaining quarter of an hour that preceded dinner, conversation became general.

"Were you at the concert, to-day, M. le Duc?" demanded a pretty-looking young

woman, who was reclining in a *bergère*, and indolently biting the leaves of some white moss-roses that formed her, at that season, almost priceless bouquet.

“What concert?” asked Gaston.

“As if there could be two!” replied the lady, reproachfully. “Why *our* concert, to be sure; Madame de G—’s *matinée*, for which we have been practising and rehearsing for these last two months.”

“A thousand pardons, Madame,” said M. de Montévieux, with a smile, “I remember; a concert organized by Madame de G—, for the victims of I really do forget the particular victims in favour of whom Madame de G— wished to make all the world sing.”

“For the victims of the late storms on the coast of Brittany; it is too bad of you, M. le Duc, not to remember these things.”

“But Madame de G— is herself a Languedocienne,” remarked Gaston. “What makes her take so warm an interest in the Kernevotes and the Tregorrois?”

“Her brother-in-law has become a Deputy for some town in the Finistère.”

“*Ah ! vous m'en direz tant !* And did you sing, Madame ?” pursued Gaston, turning to the lady who had first addressed him.

“I wonder Fame has not told you that already,” exclaimed a young man, who had hitherto been silent, “for all Paris is full of it at this hour. *Ah ! mon cher*, you never witnessed such a *succès !*” (the heroine of the white moss-roses cast a languid glance at the speaker, and vouchsafed him a sleepy smile.) “In truth, Madame la Comtesse,” continued he, “I was occupied during the whole time of your *morceau* in asking myself whether Malibran and Sontag united, could ever have shown so much talent. Such a voice ! such expression !”

“You flatter me,” lisped the lady, “I never was so enchanted in my life, as by your sister—she was delicious, quite *ravissante !*”

“Ah ! but no one can compare with you. . . .”

“Ah ! Madame de Barre also was charming, wonderful ! It is true, her voice is not so fine as it used to be. She sings music that

does not suit her. Her flexibility is astonishing, quite extraordinary."

"But mere flexibility leaves one so cold," added the determined admirer, "whereas, the dramatic and simple style,—*your* style, goes to the heart."

The *cantatrice* smiled again.

"Why certainly, Madame de Barre rarely touches one much, or if she tries to do so, she screams. It is, perhaps, wrong in me to say so, it may look like vanity, but I certainly do prefer the simple and expressive style. Did you stay till the end?"

An affirmative answer.

"Did you hear my *grand duo*?" (the *cantatrice* became more lively.)

"I did; how splendidly you gave that passage, 'è figlio mio!' you made me tremble; and M. de Marsy seconded you very well."

"*Pardon*," exclaimed the fair songstress, with a bitterness of which nothing in her previous manner could have given an idea, "he very nearly spoilt my last *entrée* by the absurd *floritura* he chose to put at the end of his

corresponding phrase. I never heard anything half so ridiculous;" and, animated with indignation, the fair Comtesse, almost with tears in her eyes, proceeded to state, in all its details, a detestable plot of which, according to her, M. de Marsy was the agent, and she herself the intended victim.

Whilst these two scions of two of the noblest houses in France were discussing, in terms that would not have been misplaced in the *coulisses*, an affair more suited to Opera-singers than to people of the world, Gaston was explaining why he had missed Madame de G—'s public *matinée*.

"To tell the truth," observed a lady of a certain age, to whom Madame de Montévieux paid great attention, "I had counted on your arm for taking me to my carriage, for Raoul had been forced to go away."

"Indeed, my dear aunt," rejoined Gaston, "I should have been too happy to be useful to you; but I was forced to go to a place where I am sure you would yourself have liked to be—to the Chamber of Deputies."

"You are very kind! Pray what may make

you imagine that I should like to find myself in such bad company? I would almost as soon go to the Tuileries,—where all the united efforts of M. and Madame Buonaparte failed to induce me to put my foot.”

Gaston laughed.

“I went,” said he, “to assist at the first speech of one of our newly re-elected deputies—our faithful and glorious ‘*flétris*!’”*

“In that case, I grant that I could have liked to be there,” replied the Princesse de la Roche Bermont (Gaston’s aunt.) “Did Berryer speak?”

“He did—and magnificently.”

“And the subject?”

“I scarcely know how to say it before Sir Edward Vernon,” and Gaston accompanied these words with a smile and a slight inclination of the head; “for I fear *ces Messieurs*

* The reader may recollect that, in the winter of 1843, the Chamber pronounced public censure on the conduct of those legitimatist deputies who had gone to see the Duc de Bordeaux in Belgrave Square. The word used was ‘*flétrir*,’ and the “*flétris*” withdrew from the Chamber and represented themselves before their constituents.

were not very polite touching England and the English government. The subject was the *droit de visite* !”

“Oh, indeed !” rejoined the Princesse. “I can conceive that on that subject Berryer must have been eloquent,” and the look that she bestowed on Sir Edward, plainly showed that good breeding alone prevented her from proceeding further.

During all this time, Mildred, when not entirely taken up in talking to the Duchess, had been occupied with a silent examination of the different objects that surrounded her. From her first entrance into the Hôtel de Montévieux she had been unable to avoid surprise. She had heard from her childhood of the poverty of the French people ; of the misery and want of comfort of their abodes ; and she had found herself in a palace, the richness of which certainly equalled, and the elegance of which as certainly surpassed, any of the fashionable houses of London.

After passing through two immense *salons*, in which gilt carvings of Louis the Fourteenth’s era, and Venetian mirrors, divided the decoration

of the walls with choice paintings of the Italian School, she had been ushered into the room we have already mentioned, and of which Mildred took an attentive survey. The floor was covered with a carpet into which the feet sunk as into deep moss. Each separate panel on the walls displayed a marvellous piece of Gobelins tapestry, representing the chivalrous feats of an ancestor of the family, performed during the wars of the *Grand Monarque*, and by him especially presented to the then existing Duke.

On the large chimney-piece of carved Italian marble, gilt bronzes of the costliest kind, twisted themselves into curious forms, and made the lights they bore appear like glittering fruit hanging amongst shining leaves. A clock, worthy of Versailles, stood in the centre, whilst all around, were countless smaller gems of art : vases of Sèvres, Dresden figures, *bonbonnières* of amethyst, and baubles of pure gold. Window draperies of crimson damask showed through their parted folds, the delicate texture of white inner curtains, embroidered with fairy fineness, much as a lady allows the Valenciennes lace on her petticoat (when it has cost five guineas

a yard) to appear through the aperture of her floating *peignoir*. *Jardinières* of boule, filled with lightly-perfumed flowers; colossal vases from Japan, whence sprung huge tufts of lilies, their gilt branches terminating in the softened radiance of a lamp; *étagères* crowded with curiosities, of which the least was alone a treasure, contributed to make of this apartment a fairy temple, whose divinity was evidently good taste.

One of the greatest beauties of the Hotel Montévieux was, that a single glance sufficed to show you that no *parvenu*, however rich, could have there made his home, and that its inhabitants must have been of old and gentle race. It was seen at once that luxury was not looked upon as a superfluity, as a sort of fine garment to be donned sometimes, and at others carefully put by; but that it was the constant and indispensable companion of existence. There were the easy habit of wealth, which had ceased to astonish its possessor, and the purity of taste that could afford *not* to accumulate in one heterogeneous mass, every object that money could obtain. The traces, too, of noble birth

met the eye at every turn ; heir-looms were in each corner, and all around, one felt the consecration of time. Throughout the gorgeous apartments of the Hotel Montévieux, it would have been as difficult to detect any object of recent acquisition, any purchase of yesterday, as any ornament, of whatever price, which did not serve for daily use.

It is not every house in Paris that can boast, in an equal degree, of this *splendeur du coin du feu*. The conditions of luxury are widely different in different *quartiers*, and in one only has it the aspect we have been endeavouring to paint. The rich bankers of the Chaussée d'Antin—from the Rothschilds downwards—though they spend more on the decorations of their houses than would keep in very proper style a gentleman's family in London—still cannot, do what they will, divest their homes of that overpowering odour of *parvenu-ism* that flies to your head every time you enter their doors. Everything is too rich, too fine, too dazzling. There is too much scarlet and gold, and blue and silver ; there are too many flowers, too many lights, too many servants ! There are visible,

too, in the masters and mistresses of the house such a profound veneration for their own goods, such a watchful carefulness, such an unquiet admiration for every article which unto them belongs ;—but, above all, every thing is too new, and shows too clearly whence it sprung.

There is, between the abode of a *gentilhomme* in Paris, and that of an *enrichi*, the difference that exists between a cashmere of Lahore and a shawl fabricated by Ternaux ; between point lace of Spain and Belgium, mellowed by the deepening tints of centuries, and the bright, staring, snow-white produce of imitative modern industry. The woman of fashion, the *lionne*, has also her style of luxury. She changes the furniture of her apartment (no matter what the price) once perhaps in every year, and at the end of a twelvemonth, denounces as *rococo* the fancies that have cost thousands ; but her style is not so much a vulgar, as it is a *bad* style, denoting instantaneously the eccentricity, if not viciousness of her mind and conduct. In the Faubourg St. Germain alone, is to be found the high-born, high-bred elegance, the unimpeachable taste, which produces that union of simplicity

and richness, of magnificence and ease, which none but a gentleman can appreciate, and to which none but a gentleman can attain.

At the same time, however, this distinction from the rest of society (a distinction which extends to manners, habits, and certain sentiments) has been bought at a price which to many may seem too high. If, as we have heard Madame de Montévreux say, there are in Paris, "places of refuge where old traditions are held sacred, and where scarcely any thing is changed since the days of Louis XVI," the class to which these "places" belong, while reserving, for its own indisputable possession, the domain of good-breeding, and of all noble traditions, has excluded itself from all participation in the realities of life. Strangers to the universal march of mind in other countries, and to the political transformations of their own; indifferent to events which they instinctively feel will pass harmless over a government they detest; keeping up, more from vanity than from any other sentiment, the superstitious worship of institutions and forms which they feel but will not avow, are

irretrievably and for ever destroyed—the aristocracy of France, in their princely hotels and châteaux, live apart from the rest of the positive world, in a world peopled with illusions of their own.

Silent, in the midst of the general clamour, or only raising their voices to utter a *bon-mot*; motionless in the midst of the universal activity; disdainful of the knowledge all the world is striving to gain; looking backwards, while the eyes of all the world are on the future; denying the existence of everything, save themselves, and their creed—they remain, politically speaking, a monument of glory in the past, and, in the present, of utter inutility. In a moral sense, they are of far greater consequence; and without them, you might, from one end of France to the other, search in vain for gentlemanly manners, habits, feelings, or traditions.

Just as the conversation was beginning to place itself on the treacherous ground of present politics, dinner was announced, and, in a few minutes more, Lady Vernon found herself seated by the side of the Duc de Montévieux,

on whose other hand was his aunt, the *Princesse de la Roche Bermont*. Opposite to Mildred (to the right of the mistress of the house) was an ecclesiastic, the *Curé* of a metropolitan parish, and confessor to the Duchess. From the face of this venerable man—venerable more from his evident saintliness, than from his age, for he could not have been more than fifty—Lady Vernon could not, despite her rigid Protestant tenets, avert her almost constant attention.

The Abbé de Nangis seemed, indeed, formed by nature for his sublime ministry. Such a mixture of mildness and dignity is but rarely to be found, as was visible on the countenance of the man, of whom an illustrious prelate had said: "I know not whether he be more angel than saint, or more saint than angel; but one of the two, if not both, he assuredly is." If, in the broad expanse of brow, and in the finely-chiselled nose, might be traced certain marks of an inflexible firmness, that showed what a character of majesty indignation must impart to his countenance, the pure lines of the benignant mouth, and the gentle, kind, expression of the eye, showed also that none but the impeni-

tent guilty could excite it. Above all the rest of his priestly functions, you would at once have said that M. de Nangis was best qualified for those of a confessor; for you saw instantaneously, that, if sorrow and remorse were sure to find in him advice, consolation, and pardon, indifference would not pass unproved, and that the species of Jesuitical casuistry with which people of the world contrive to disguise their sins, even to themselves, would meet with the uncompromising severity due to such impious prevarication. Every one at table, from the master and his guests down to the last of the serving-men, treated the Abbé with a respect, which, from a thousand little circumstances, was visibly paid even more to the man than to the priest.

Before the first glass of wine that followed the soup had well gone round, Sir Edward took an opportunity of addressing M. de Montévreux from the opposite side of the table. "If I mistake not, M. le Duc, you were at the *Odéon* last Thursday evening?"

Mildred felt wretched, and wondered how her

husband could make such an allusion before her.

“ I was ;” replied the Duke ; “ how unfortunate for me not to have been already aware—perhaps, unconsciously, I was in your neighbourhood ?”

“ The very next box,” replied Sir Edward.

Mildred became crimson, and felt so painfully convinced that she had been, upon that occasion, placed in an equivocal position by her mere approximation to persons whom she imagined must be out of the pale of society, that, in her confusion, she found no answer to Gaston’s question of “ how had she liked *Lucrèce* ?” Luckily, Madame de Montévieux came to her aid.

“ So !” said she, looking good-naturedly at her son, “ So ! You were *there* on Thursday ! It was to admire M. Ponsard’s verses, that you left me at Madame de D—’s ? Well ! if I am not indiscreet, with whom were you ?”

“ With Madame de Cévèzes,” answered Gaston carelessly.

“Ah !” said the Duchess, with an emphasis and an expression of physiognomy wherein the very uninitiated alone could have failed to read volumes.

“And with Madame Ferrières,” added the young man, somewhat hastily.

The Abbé looked displeased.

“*Voyons, chère Duchesse,*” drawled forth the Comtesse de Brévannes (the lady of the white roses and the *grand duo*), “pray do not be severe upon Madame de Cévèzes ; you know she is my intimate friend.”

Lady Vernon could scarcely control the manifestation of her surprise. What ! the woman whose conversation she had overheard, was received in society, and claimed as a friend by a person admitted at the table of the Duchesse de Montévieux ?

“I compliment you on your choice, *ma chère,*” said the Duchess, ironically.

“We were brought up together, and mamma and Madame de Vallemer, you know, were always inseparable. I assure you, Aurélie is much better than her reputation ; besides

which, she is such a dear, odd, creature, and so delightfully amusing !”

“That may be,” replied the Duchess, “but you forget that Madame de Moreton is my cousin.”

“Well, really, Duchess,” continued Madame de Brévannes, “I think you must allow that the Viscount has been far more to blame than Aurélie.”

“More to blame, Madame la Comtesse !” exclaimed the Princesse de la Roche Bermont, rather indignantly. “I am at a loss to comprehend how, in a case where there can be no excuse, there can be more or less blame ?”

“Why in truth,” retorted Madame de Brévannes, “the strongest are not always strong ; look at Madame de Boislambert !”

The mention of this name made a profound impression ; a shade passed over every countenance and from almost every breast escaped a sigh.

“Poor Louise !” said the Duchess.

The *Curé* laid down his knife and fork, and passed his hand over his forehead.

The Princess shrugged her shoulders, and consoling herself with a long pinch from a gold

snuff-box, on which was the portrait of Marie-Antoinette mounted in diamonds, murmured,—
“It is perfectly inconceivable!”

“There! you see how unjust you are!” observed Madame de Brévannes; “you condemn Madame de Cévèzes without pity; and when one of your own particular idols is in question, you are all astonishment and indulgence.”

“But what a difference, Countess!” rejoined Madame de Montévieux; “for, intimate as you may be with the Baroness, I do not imagine that you would ever dream of comparing her with our unfortunate Louise.”

“Their educations were so different!” objected the Countess.

“Indeed they were, I promise you!” added Madame de la Roche Bermont. “It is not under the guardianship of her sainted mother, or under the care of her aunt, the Supérieure of the Dames de la Visitation de St. Malo, that she would have learned much proficiency in those *lionneries* of which your friend the Baroness is so proud.”

“Poor thing!” said the Duchess, “I was present at her marriage.”

“And I,” added the Abbé mournfully, “gave her the nuptial benediction.”

“Well do I remember that, M. le Curé,” rejoined the Princesse de la Roche Bermont; “for you never made a more impressive discourse.”

“That is not extraordinary, Madame la Princesse,” replied he, “for I never felt more deeply moved upon any occasion. I had baptized as an infant, admonished as a child, confessed as a girl, the woman who knelt at the altar. Five short years before, she had knelt upon the same spot, when, for the first time, I administered to her the Holy wafer in Communion. I knew—I am convinced I knew—every secret of her mind and heart; and, up to the time when I was obliged to leave Paris, a year and a half ago, I could have told every thought that crossed her brain. A purer, nobler, more high-minded, or more sincerely pious being, never bent her knee in my confessional. You may judge, Madame la Princesse,

of my astonishment, of my horror, of my grief, when, on my return from Rome, three days ago, I heard the dreadful news that awaited me."

"You can of course form no idea of where she is likely to have flown for refuge?" said Gaston, with a look of real interest. The Abbé shook his head. "Not the most distant one," replied he; "but I hope, and I think I am sure, that she will have sought spiritual comfort in religion; and that, what I know must be her sorrow and her repentance, may have found grace in the eyes of Him who alone can vouchsafe forgiveness."

"What has become of M. de Boislambert?" inquired Madame de Montévreux.

"No one appears to know," replied her son; "he was absent at his *terre* in Lorraine when his wife left her home, and was immediately sent for; but, since then, every one seems ignorant of what has occurred."

"Well!" remarked Madame de Brévannes, "you will not say, that it was *he* who drove her to forget her duty—for if ever a husband existed who spoilt and doted on his wife, that husband was General de Boislambert."

“Well!” said the Abbé de Nangis, “I never liked the marriage, and so I told Madame de Beaumeillant; but her husband’s last wish had been, that a union should take place between the General and his daughter. I did not—Heaven is my witness—fear for the conduct of Mademoiselle de Beaumeillant, but for her happiness. I, too, thought she should have married a younger man; but the noble, the almost perfect character of M. de Boislambert, and Mademoiselle de Beaumeillant’s own assurances that she wished to become his wife, tranquillized me, and made me hope that her future happiness was as much assured as I felt certain his must be.”

The Duchess turned to her neighbour. “You can have no conception, Sir Edward,” said she, “how this unfortunate event has affected the society of our Faubourg; for, though the General de Boislambert differed in politics wholly and totally from us all, we had, from his and his wife’s birth and connections, never ceased to regard him as one of us.”

“I confess I had been taught to think,” replied Sir Edward, with a smile, “that

occurrences of this kind were more frequent in Paris society, and consequently less heeded than I perceive is the case."

"'Paris society' is a wide word, Sir Edward," answered Madame de Montévieux; "we have our own, and mix but little in that which is generally so termed; but amongst the singularities with which we are reproached by a certain world—from which we hold ourselves entirely apart, is to be reckoned that of the respect we still retain for the faith of our ancestors, and for the traditions of honour they have transmitted to us. We say '*noblesse oblige*;' and certainly, in that sense, the *grands seigneurs* and the *grandes dames* of our two revolutions, have a perfect right to their liberty of action." These last words were uttered with an expression of disdain that, in any one less unmistakably a gentlewoman than the Duchess, would have been all but unseemly; in her it was so evidently unaffected that it scarcely struck you at all.

"How very strange that we, who live so much abroad, and particularly in Paris, should have formed so incorrect an opinion of the

general state of morality in the upper classes of French society," observed Sir Edward.

"In the first place," replied the Duchess, "allow me to remark, that I am not speaking of the general state of morality in France, or of general society, but of one particular portion of the Parisian world; and in the next, do not be offended if I ask you, how your compatriots should be able to form a just estimate of the manners, or social habits of any nation they may visit, seeing that they rarely associate with any but themselves, or with the least respectable of the foreigners who surround them. As to their entire ignorance of our particular customs and traditions, that is easily accounted for, by the small opportunities they have of observing us."

"How so?" interrupted Sir Edward, with much curiosity.

"We frequent, but very little, the houses of others, and receive almost as little in our own. Our circles are formed of our relations, connections, and intimate friends; but of what the world styles chance acquaintances, we have, I may safely say, none. Above all, we avoid

foreigners, and, for instance, I may tell you that Lady Vernon and yourself are the only English people who have entered this house since 1830 ; but then," and Madame de Montévieux had a grace of manner whilst saying this to which nothing can be compared ; " you will accept our intimacy, I hope ; for of what is termed amusement, or gaiety, we have but little to offer."

Sir Edward had hardly completed the expression of his thanks, when his attention was attracted by Madame de Brévannes, who called upon him, in his character of an Englishman, and consequently an *habitué* of the turf, to settle some knotty point between herself and her neighbour, concerning the winner of last year's Derby. The question decided, Sir Edward could not help expressing his surprise at finding a French lady so learned in such lore. The Duchess smilingly interrupted him. " Ah," said she, shaking her head at the Countess, " Irène is quite spoilt, she is becoming a perfect *lionne* !"

" *Fumez-vous, Madame ?*" asked the Princesse

de la Roche Bermont, with a look and a tone as difficult to imagine as to describe.

Whilst exclaiming: "*Oh ! Princesse !*" with well-affected disgust, the Countess looked somewhat confused. "You have so terrified Sir Edward Vernon, *chère Duchesse*," continued she, "with your account of my sins, that he has refused to take a *sorbet à la Caradoc*. That is a crime of *lèse-friandise* that ought not to be forgiven. You ought to try one, Sir Edward, for two reasons: first, that this is the only house in Paris where they are as good as at the inventor's own table; and next, out of patriotism, and because it is no slight merit in an Englishman to have attached his name to anything in the kingdom of Vatel and Carème."

"I will take one, Madame la Comtesse, because you recommend it," rejoined Sir Edward, who seemed to wish, for some unknown reason, to be more than commonly civil to Madame de Brévannes; and, as he raised to his lips the glass of what looked like rose-coloured snow, the bow he addressed to her was answered by a careless, languid smile.

Between the end of dinner and the early hour when it is usual in Paris to leave the house where you have dined, the Duchess's *salon* became animated by one of those delicious *causeries*, of which the secret is not wholly lost in France, but which is principally to be met with in perfection in the *boudoirs* of the Faubourg St. Germain. The *matter* was nothing, it was the *manner* that was so charming. The most futile subjects (indeed such alone were broached) became the framework to which was attached a whole arsenal of the fireworks of wit—" *de l'esprit, de l'esprit, toujours de l'esprit!*" as Rousseau said of Voltaire. It flashed, frothed, and sparkled; but when it was once done, left behind it as little as the light of a rocket, or the foam on a glass of champagne. Mildred, who had been duly presented to the whole circle, took rather an attentive than an active part in the conversation. Not so Sir Edward, who, for upwards of half-an-hour, devoted himself to Madame de Brévannes.

When the party broke up, he had already made an appointment to meet the fair Countess

on the ensuing day, at the *Manège*, in order to assist her with his opinion on the merits of a horse she had an inclination to purchase.

“That is,” premised she, laughing in her somnolent way, “if Lady Vernon will not be jealous ; for I have heard so much of the jealousy of your English wives, that I confess they frighten me out of my wits.”

CHAPTER IV.

FOR a fortnight after her first *grand dîner* in Paris, nothing happened that could materially influence Mildred's opinion of French society, excepting that, from her closer intimacy with the *habitués* of the Hotel Montévieux—she perceived that there were some people in France who had the good taste not to treat either vice or virtue lightly, but boldly to reprobate the one and as boldly to uphold the other.

I will not say that, upon a nearer examination, Gaston de Montévieux would have been found to be as rigid in any of his opinions as his mother. He had mixed somewhat more than she had with the society of the Revolution of July, and amongst a certain set of men, club and *coulisse*

fixtures, (*et tout ce qui s'ensuit*), many of his earlier ideas had been changed, though certainly not to the advantage of humanity. Still, the Duc de Montévieux had retained all his gentlemanly habits; and whatever he might admit in his conscience as possible or impossible, the uneradicable good taste he had been taught to venerate from his cradle forbade him from openly professing immorality, or seeking to ridicule its reverse. Gaston might have been corrupt, but never could have been cynical. His mother, with all a woman's, and a French-woman's tact, guessed instinctively that her son differed from her upon more than one point; so did the Abbé de Nangis; but they were both of them too able tacticians, and too certain, in the main, of Gaston's good heart and honourable principles, to provoke an explosion on his part by inquiring too deeply into his opinions.

Not a day passed without bringing together the Vernons and M. de Montévieux. He accompanied them in the morning, and met them in the evening. Often alone with Mildred (for Sir Edward was now constantly engaged, no

one knew where), Gaston's ideas, though they had sometimes startled, had as yet never shocked Lady Vernon. She felt perfectly at her ease with him, and took a decided pleasure in his society ; whilst he, on the other hand, initiated her into many of the little secret intricacies of Paris life, without which such a novice as she was would have been lost.

Mildred had already, on the few occasions afforded her of appearing in the world, obtained the reputation of a beauty, and in all the fashionable circles of Paris, *la belle Lady Vernon* was spoken of as an object of curiosity and admiration. This celebrity seemed to please the husband more than it did the wife ; and whilst Sir Edward evidently enjoyed the notoriety, Mildred shrunk from it abashed.

In the very first days of May a ball was to be given at the —— embassy, towards which all Paris was anxiously looking. The night came. Mildred, as she passed through the long suite of rooms, leaning on her husband's arm, and sought the spot where the Ambassadors was standing, could not avoid hearing the admiring murmurs that both met and followed

her steps. She turned to her husband once as if to catch his eye, but he was searching for some one in the crowd; and as soon as he perceived the Duc de Montévieux, he darted off, leaving his wife to Gaston's care.

As the latter was conducting Mildred to a seat, "How late you are!" said he. "My mother has been here this hour, and looking for you everywhere."

"Is the Duchess here to-night?" inquired Lady Vernon, surprised. "I thought she never frequented these great crowds."

"Rarely enough," replied the Duke; "but she is here to-night for a particular purpose. Madame de Moreton has just arrived in town, and my mother has come on her account. She desired me to say, if I met you, that she wishes to present her to you, and counts upon your kindness for being more than usually amiable to my cousin. You are aware of her position?"

"Perfectly," answered Mildred. "Poor thing! Is her husband here, do you think?"

"Here? of course he is! I have been talking to Madame de Cévèzes in the card-room."

"How can you do so?" rejoined Mildred, reproachfully. "I really cannot understand your continuing on even bowing terms with either her or the Viscount."

"Why, after all," answered Gaston, "what business is it of mine? I am very sorry for my cousin, but she has two brothers, and if they do not choose to take up their sister's quarrels and cut Moreton's throat, I have really no right to do so. Moreton and I are old acquaintances; I will not say friends, for I do not approve his conduct, and would not make him my intimate; but, if one were to cut every man who is faithless to his wife, one should soon have no one left to bow to."

"But the Baroness?" added Mildred, indignantly. "How do you continue to know her?"

"Because in France no man is ever otherwise than polite to a woman, whatever may be his opinion of her conduct; and also, because one meets her everywhere; and that, after all, she is exceedingly amusing."

Mildred was not satisfied with this answer, but said no more. The Duke seated himself

beside her in one of the principal *salons*, and offered to show to her the different celebrities as they passed.

“Above all,” exclaimed Lady Vernon, “who is that ghost-like looking woman?”

“Which? the one who is leaning, in a half-inspired sort of attitude, against the marble column?”

“Yes! with her head wrapped up in a veil, and eyes that are starting out of their orbits.”

“That is the famous *Princesse Belcolore*, of whom you surely must have heard.”

“Never!”

“How vexed she would be if she thought that! The dream of her life has been notoriety, and she certainly has left no stone unturned to obtain it. She arrived here from Italy, an exile, some ten or twelve years since; and her fancy for the moment was poverty. With enough in her purse to have lived, like all the world, she resolved to lodge in a garret, and there she was to be found, cooking her own dinner and mending her own clothes; *de plus*, giving lessons in painting. She soon, however, tired of this, and after taking successively every

different tone in politics, Religion, literature and the arts, she found it convenient to be reconciled to the Austrian Government, and to open a magnificent house with the fortune the Amnesty had restored to her. Here, the various comedies that were enacted, it would be difficult to enumerate. One day, politics were the rage, and not a petty journalist but was received with open arms; the next, music reigned supreme, and pianists supplanted politicians. One never knew with whom one was, or was not; and a story is told of the Marquis de C—— having his card returned to him at the door by a page (an original in his way) with these words: ‘You are too late, M. le Marquis. You should have called last month. *Voilà tantôt trois semaines que nous ne recevons que de la canaille.*’ ”

“ But her husband ? ” interrupted Mildred.

Gaston laughed. “ Oh! *le cher Prince* was not likely to be very severe; he had begun by striking out a road for himself, totally separate from that followed by his wife; and he ended by running away last year with a fair lady, who some years before had herself run away with her husband,

under pretence that she loved no one else well enough to marry him. But to return to the Princess. Before you, Lady Vernon, I can scarcely hint at the irregularities of her conduct ; but, suffice it to say that they were such, that even here, amongst the most eccentric of the *lionnes*, she has been looked upon as a kind of curiosity.

“ Well, after having recourse to everything to attract and enchain fame : to poverty and politics, music and magnetism, vanity and vice, charity and Chinese (for she shut herself up to study the language) she has ended by writing a work in ten volumes on certain Fathers of the Church, wherein, to be for once consistent, she has dwelt with great complacency on the sinful portions of their lives, and on the temptations over which they triumphed. In allusion to this work and to the strange mixture of lip-orthodoxy and impropriety of conduct exhibited by the Princesse Belcolore, Heinrich Heine is reported to have said of her : ‘ That woman is only fit to become the Abbess of a convent of Benedictine monks.’ ”

Mildred was about to make some observation, when Gaston interrupted her by directing

her attention to a gentleman who was speaking to the Princess.

This was a half-military looking man, with a resolute air, and a blue coat buttoned up to the chin with brass buttons, who could not have been passed by without eliciting a remark. There was that in his bare forehead, arched nose, and brilliant eye, that utterly forbade inattention. Still less likely is it that he would have been left unnoticed, had any stranger come within hearing of his voice.

“That is Berryer,” said Gaston, “the greatest orator we have, in the purely dramatical sense of the word. For everything else, there is one who leaves far behind, not only him, but every political speaker in France;—turn round, and look at the centre figure of a group that has formed itself just by the window.”

Mildred did as she was desired, and beheld a head, such as is rarely seen, but, once observed, is never to be forgotten.

On the broad, furrowed, pale, expanse of brow, the whole weight of an empire might have rested; with the bold, daring glance of that bright eagle eye, the destinies of an

empire might have been controlled; by the sharp, firm, compression of that proud, disdainful lip, the fate of an empire might have been sealed. Never did outward appearances better serve a man who acts as though his only business were to deceive. The thoughtfulness of the brow is false, the bright boldness of the eye, the firm disdain of the lips—all, all are false!

“Mildred smiled, “I almost think I can guess who that is,” said she with a smile. “Is it not . . .?”

“Monsieur Guizot,” added Gaston, finishing her sentence. “Yes! There is one of the greatest orators we ever had. All that the features promise, the talent fulfils; and nothing can describe the torrent of eloquence I have heard pour from those hard lips.”

“And you a legitimist, M. le Duc!” exclaimed Mildred.

“Even as you say, Lady Vernon,” replied Gaston; “and I yet a legitimist. I am putting aside the party, and am speaking of the talent, of the individual intelligence, as I might of a work of art. However I may deprecate and

detest (as on a late occasion) the opinions of the Minister, and the cause by him defended, I cannot but be transported by the Speaker's force and skill."

Gaston was about to point out to Mildred several other celebrities; he had already named Victor Hugo, big at that period with the "coming event" of his promised elevation to the Peerage, and nothing daunted by the fate of his *Burgraves*; he had marked the poet-statesman, Lamartine, who, tall and aristocratic-looking, was bending gracefully over the chimney-piece, and defending with elegant energy his late conversion to the doctrines of the opposition, against the ugliest man in France, M. Villemain; he had signalized in one corner M. Duchâtel, talking to the Chancellor and to the Duc Decazes; in another, M. Thiers, gesticulating in front of M. Molé and hanging fast to the button-hole of the noble peer's coat; and he was on the point of naming a lady to whom he had just bowed, the notorious, rather than celebrated Countess S—, when the voice of Madame de Montévreux struck upon Mildred's ear.

"So!" exclaimed the Duchess, "after much

seeking, found at length; and now, if you please, let us make up for moments lost. Allow me, dear Lady Vernon, to present you my cousin, Madame la Vicomtesse de Moreton. You know my motto: *que s'entr'aiment ceux que j'aime*; therefore, as Clémentine is *almost* my child, you are bound, both of you, to be warm and sincere friends."

"It shall not be my fault if we are not so," said Mildred, frankly extending her hand.

As Madame de Moreton stood leaning on the Duchess's arm, it was difficult to conceive a more interesting figure. From beneath the broad braids of her light brown hair, of that peculiarly delicate tint, termed *blond cendré*, the pure outlines of her features made her resemble a Madonna of Overbeck. Through the fringe that bordered the somewhat drooping lids, her large soft eyes beamed with that tender radiance we may sometimes discern in the eye of a young fawn. Very slight, and apparently not much past twenty, there was yet, in the almost girlish beauty of the Vicomtesse, a something that pained, even more than it pleased. The pale-

ness of that young cheek was unnatural, and a certain anxious, imploring look, that from time to time trembled in those deep violet eyes, told of sufferings unconsolated, and of ardent entreaties spurned.

M. de Montévieux had risen to yield his place to his mother, and the two ladies sat down one on each side of Mildred, who was unfeignedly charmed with her new acquaintance.

Soon, however, the Duchess made a sign to her son. "Give me your arm, Gaston," said she. "I have just perceived in the door-way some one who will give me news of the General."

"Of what General?"

"M. de Boislambert. Come." And the Duchess, taking her son's arm, moved away. Madame de Moreton sighed.

"Have you heard that history, Lady Vernon?" asked she of her neighbour.

"Of course," replied Mildred; "but does it then also interest you?"

"More than most people; for Madame de

Boislambert was my dearest, most intimate friend."

Lady Vernon had heard of the Viscountess as of one whose morals and conduct were above even a remark; and she turned to her surprised.

"Is it possible," said she, "that you can continue to take any interest in so guilty a creature?"

"I knew her from her infancy. She was ever my best and kindest friend," repeated Madame de Moreton again.

"But surely," insisted Mildred, "her infamous conduct has destroyed your sentiments of friendship? Surely every other feeling must be absorbed in the all-powerful one of reprobation?"

"Far from it," replied Madame de Moreton. "What right can I have to condemn her? I pity her from the bottom of my soul."

"Pity!" said Mildred; "not condemn? Why, good Heavens! where then is the distinction between vice and virtue? Where is the recompense? Where the punishment?"

“Oh! dear Lady Vernon!” exclaimed the Viscountess, “do you then count for nothing the reproaches of our own conscience? Do you think that the guilty can taste happiness of which you, the innocent, should be envious? Is then virtue so unblessed a thing that, losing it, you shall not have lost all? We have, I see, different modes of judging these questions in England and in France; but forgive me, Lady Vernon, if I think ours the most moral, the most christian-like of the two.”

This was a theme on which Mildred had such decided, determined convictions, that she never declined a discussion, and therefore resumed:

“But upon the public and inflexible condemnation of sin is founded the only chance of social morality. The punishment—”

The Viscountess interrupted her:

“Punishment for punishment’s sake, Lady Vernon, is an odious and a useless thing. When to chastise is not to mend, it is to do worse than nothing. We, erring as we are, have no power to revenge. The power to reclaim has been

given us, and, believe me, it is the nearest to a divine attribute that we possess."

"But the example!" objected Mildred.

"Will never deter the absolutely wicked from the perpetration of crime, and will scare the timid and the accidentally erring from returning to the paths of virtue."

"I confess I have been taught to make no such nice distinctions between those whom I regard with equal horror," rejoined Mildred.

"Equal horror, Lady Vernon!" exclaimed the Viscountess, with undisguised surprise—"equal horror! What! equal for the shameless who glory in their sin, and for the repentant fallen? Oh! do not say that!"

"But I must say it," rejoined Mildred, with a smile; "for, though I am sorry it offends you, (this was a great deal for Lady Vernon to admit!) it is an article of my social creed."

"Then I rejoice that you did not know my poor Louise, for I would not have had her rendered more miserable than she must be by the sight of a friend who, in her need, should turn away from her, and who, in her anguish, should refuse to take her out-stretched hand."

What Lady Vernon might have answered is not known, if her attention had not been attracted by the death-like paleness that suddenly overspread her companion's face. She followed the direction of the Viscountess's eyes, and, in a door-way opening into an inner room, perceived Madame de Cévèzes leaning on the arm of a tall, dark man, whom she had but little trouble in recognising as M. de Moreton.

The intention of the Baroness was evident; she wanted to appear before the Viscountess in the attitude of her husband's enslaver, which was easily to be accomplished, as M. de Moreton was not aware of Clémentine's presence at the ball. Chance, however, saved Madame de Moreton from the humiliation prepared for her by her rival. The Viscount, as he turned to enter the room, looked round; and at the opposite end of the *salon*, perceived his wife. He was as instantaneously aware of the Baroness's plan as determined to defeat it; and scarcely had he seen Madame de Moreton when he abruptly disengaged his arm from that of Aurélie, and quitted the room, leaving Madame de Cévèzes alone, and a prey to more rage than

she chose to let her pretty face betray. Ten minutes later, Sir Edward Vernon passed before the sofa where his wife and the Viscountess were seated, with Madame de Cévèzes on his arm. In passing her, he gave a smile of recognition to Mildred, who barely answered it by an inclination of the head, for she was shocked for Madame de Moreton.

"Who is that gentleman?" asked the latter.

"My husband."

The Viscountess looked hurt. "He is very handsome," remarked she, in what she tried to render a careless tone.

"Have you no wish to join the dancers in the ball-room?" asked M. de Montévieux, who had just found his way to Madame de Moreton's side. "*Ma belle cousine*, will you not try one little *tour de valse*?"

"I had rather not dance to-night," murmured his cousin.

"And you, Lady Vernon?"

Mildred blushed very deeply, and seemed aware that she was giving utterance to something extraordinary in replying, "I never waltz but with my husband."

Sir Edward had joined the group unperceived, (and alone this time.) A laugh was his first comment on Lady Vernon's speech. She turned round with no very pleased countenance.

"Come, Mildred," said he, "do not look angry; it does not suit you at all. Just get up and waltz with M. de Montévreux, like a good child, and without any more nonsense. I assure you, M. le Duc, you will find her an excellent partner."

Lady Vernon still hesitated; but her husband drew closer to her.

"You have made me ridiculous enough already," said he; "I must beg of you to do so no more."

These words, though whispered, were in so sharp a tone, that Mildred immediately rose, and laying her right hand on Gaston's proffered arm, and with the left supporting Madame de Moreton, the three proceeded together towards the ball-room. The last figure of a quadrille was not yet finished. The Duchesse de Montévreux joined the party.

"At last then, *chère belle*," she began,

smilingly addressing Lady Vernon, "you have been persuaded to waltz with some one besides your husband."

"Edward would have it so," replied Lady Vernon.

"Well," replied the Duchess, "do not look so grave, or you will be paying Gaston too bad a compliment. But let me take care of Clémentine while you dance." And so saying she passed the Viscountess's arm within her own.

The first notes of Strauss's *Donau Lieder* had hardly commenced, before Sir Edward Vernon and Madame de Cévèzes were to be seen gliding swiftly over the glass-like surface of the *parquet*.

"Do you wish to stay longer here?" asked Madame de Moreton of the Duchess.

"No ; but it is very early. Do you already wish to go?"

"I am tired to death," pursued the Viscountess.

The Duchess took her hand. "You know, Clémentine, I only came because I was resolved you should be seen here to-night ; therefore let us go at whatever moment you please."

The two ladies disappeared, after bidding adieu to Lady Vernon, who was just preparing to follow her partner into the glittering throng of the dancers.

Gaston de Montévieux was, in spite of his mother and the Abbé,—who would both have wished to deny the fact,—a *lion* of the very first order. He was too strikingly handsome not to be adored by the women, and too famous for possessing all the qualities of a genuine *grand seigneur* not to be a favourite with the men. He was, besides this, enormously rich. His horses were finer than any, and he rode them better than most people; he gave the best suppers, carried off the greatest *succès*, and was *le plus beau joueur du monde*. This was more than enough to render celebrated any woman whom Gaston should admire; and before the waltz was ended, nearly every man of any note in the room had asked to be presented to Lady Vernon. Mildred could not be blind to the sensation she created, but she watched anxiously for her husband, for she felt lonely and lost in the midst of so much *éclat*. At length she saw him approaching her, and with a smile that

had in it more coquetry than one should have dreamed of from her,

“Are you coming to reclaim your partner at last?” said she, in a gentle voice.

“No, indeed, my love, I am engaged twenty deep ; but I am coming to compliment you on your success. Every one is talking of you, and you will be obliged to dance with all the world.”

“That is just what annoys me,” replied Mildred. “I can now refuse no one, and I do not think it right to dance in this way with every stranger !”

Sir Edward interrupted her : “for Heaven’s sake, Mildred, do not be a fool ! It is perfectly right and proper ; it is what every one else does, and what I hope to see you doing every night.”

Lady Vernon was astounded. This was the first time her husband had ever addressed her in such a manner. She however concealed, as well as she could, her vexation, and in a more winning tone, “I will do as you choose,” answered she, “but I wish that this once you would humour me, and let me escape from the crowd ; the heat overpowers me.”

“Then go home, my dear child ; I have no wish to prevent you from doing in that respect whatever you think fit.”

“You will stay ?” inquired Mildred, perceiving that her husband was preparing to turn away.

“Certainly.”

“Shall I send back the carriage for you ?”

“Not the least necessity for it—the night is beautiful—good bye—I am engaged for this polka !” And Sir Edward left his wife, and hastened to secure his partner.

Gaston was there ; he handed Lady Vernon to her carriage, and, jumping into his own brougham, drove away.

Sir Edward was now left at perfect liberty to do whatever might please him best. M. de Moreton had quitted the *salons* of the Embassy almost immediately after ascertaining the presence of his wife ; and Madame de Cévèzes, delivered of whatever restraint he might impose upon her, was determined to turn her freedom to good account. Her acquaintance with Sir Edward Vernon dated from the day when he had agreed to assist Madame de

Brévannes in the choice of a horse. At the *Manège* he found the two friends together; Aurélie attired for riding, and mounted on an Arab mare "not wilder," to use her own expression, "but as wild, as herself." Horse and rider went through numberless feats and evolutions, each more extraordinary than the other; and Sir Edward (who did not exactly see that the whole was 'got up' especially for him) was enchanted, without at first being able to decide which was the more lovely or more *folle* of the two: the little, soft, white sylph that filled the saddle, or the little black, vicious demon that bore it.

The feeling with which Aurélie inspired him at this first interview was nearly akin to that which is produced by the clever tricks of a cat or a monkey. He felt the sort of irresistible desire, inherent to human creatures, to make a pet of an animal that, in addition to its beauty, bites and scratches. He had, in his childish days, seen Jenny Vertpré in *La Chatte*, and Madame de Cévèzes realized his idea of a feline love. From this time he had continued to meet Aurélie at Madame de Brévannes', and had

never thought it necessary to inform Mildred of the fact ; so that, when she saw her husband giving his arm to the Baroness, she supposed they had been that evening presented to one another for the first time.

Madame de Cévèzes had two reasons for drawing Sir Edward into a flirtation. First ; she saw that with him she could indulge her passion for fun and frolic,—which is by no means an easy matter even for a *lionne* in Paris, where, as long as you remain within the boundaries of good society, what *we* call fun is regarded as improper, and where, as soon as you have passed beyond that barrier, it becomes by no means a laughing matter ; — and next, she could not resist the pleasure of sowing discord and distrust between two people who were reported to be sincerely attached, nor the desire to force a moral Englishman into the, at least apparent, forgetfulness of his duty. The Viscount was so determined to revenge himself to the death upon any man who should venture to approach Madame de Cévèzes, that in the conviction he entertained of no one caring to provoke him, he sometimes overlooked possible

dangers, and allowed the wily Baroness rather more security than was quite consistent with prudence.

Be it as it may, on the night of the ball, Aurélie and Sir Edward were left to their own guidance as entirely as though neither were held by a tie of any kind in the world. Towards two o'clock, the *salons*, as is usual in Paris, were cleared of all except the most determined dancers, amongst whom Sir Edward's *compatriotes* shone conspicuous. Madame de Brévannes, having received from the Baroness the refusal of accompanying her home, had retired ; and of Aurélie's habitual acquaintances no one remained save a few men.

But it was now that the brilliancy of the fête was at its climax, for the intrepid few who remained ; now that the flowers exhaled their spiciest perfumes ; now that the voice of the orchestra uttered witching notes of joy ; now that the floor seemed to recede from the gliding foot, and that pleasure, forgetful of aught except itself, was rapidly merging into what sober people denominate, frenzy. From polka to waltz and from waltz to

mazurka, Madame de Cévèzes had constantly been the partner of Sir Edward, and for the last hour his arm had scarcely left her slender waist.

There was no denying that she was very lovely; and then, too, so peculiarly fairy-like! Her white tarlatane dress (she wore nothing richer) floated round her like gossamer, and its light flounces fluttered like the wings of butterflies. In the centre of her *corsage à l'enfant* bloomed a cluster of natural flowers; red rose-buds and geraniums, and two large *touffes* of the same, were the sole ornaments of her head. No diamonds, no rich stuffs, no chains, no rings, no laces—except indeed that which trimmed her handkerchief and made it as valuable as many a jewelled diadem. This, in its arrogant simplicity, was her *toilette*; and no Wili or Sylphide ever seemed more an inhabitant of the air, than did Aurélie as her tiny feet bore her noiselessly round the room. In Sir Edward's mind, the idea of the curiosity, of the pet bird or favourite kitten, was still uppermost; but mingled with it was something else he did not so well define.

When the cotillon was ended and the Ambassadors had retired, the number of guests waiting in the ante-room did not exceed thirty at the utmost. Carriage after carriage was announced, but no servant of the Baroness's answered the call of the Ambassador's *chasseur*.

"I am afraid you will have to drive me home, which will take you considerably out of your way," observed Aurélie.

"I wish I could," answered Sir Edward; "but, unluckily, I begged Lady Vernon not to send back the carriage."

Madame de Cévèzes advanced carelessly to a window that looked upon the court, and drew aside the curtain. A few moments more elapsed, and still none of her *gens* appeared. There now remained not more than ten or twelve people in the ante-room. Aurélie cast a rapid glance upon these, and another on the string of carriages in the court.

"Come along, Sir Edward!" exclaimed she, abruptly, "there is my carriage; I will walk to it," and she darted towards the door.

"You will catch your death of cold,"

objected her prudent cavalier, "wait at least, till your servant brings your cloak."

"Wait!" rejoined Madame de Cévèzes, impatiently, "I may wait an hour—I am tired of waiting, I tell you. There is the carriage, at the end of the court. I will walk to it, and if you do not choose to come, why, *bon soir*;" and, thus saying, Aurélie hurried down the stone steps of the *perron*, followed by Sir Edward, who had barely time to secure his paletot and fling it over his arm.

"That is the wildest little animal in Paris," said Colonel Mowbray, as the Baroness bounded past him, and descended into the open air; and, with the gesture and grimace of a man who is rejoicing over a blazing fire upon having escaped from a tempest without: "*J'aime mieux que ce soit Moreton que moi*," added he; at which most of the bystanders chuckled.

"Follow me!" cried Aurélie, when Sir Edward had joined her, and she flew, rather than ran, to the very end of the court. They had passed the outer gates, and were actually in the street.

Sir Edward looked up and down and on all sides, in dismay. "But I see no signs of your carriage," he remarked, almost in alarm.

Aurélie burst into a loud fit of laughter. "Did you really think you had any chance of doing so?"

Sir Edward stared. "Why then, did you?"—

The Baroness interrupted him. "There is no time for talking, *mon cher Monsieur*; be so kind as to give me, first your paletot, and next your arm, and then, *ma foi!*—à la guerre comme à la guerre—we must walk to our homes. *Comme c'est drôle!*" and Aurélie laughed like a child escaped from school.

Sir Edward did as he was bid, and in a few moments more, found himself alone with Madame de Cévèzes in one of the loneliest streets of the Faubourg St. Germain.

When they had arrived at the Place Belle Chasse, the Baroness came to a full stop, and turning quickly round, "Pray now, did you really imagine," enquired she, "that I was fool enough, if I had in fact perceived my carriage, to run off to it so eagerly for the sole purpose of saving five minutes?"

"Upon my life, I scarcely know what I imagined."

"That is to say that, *en termes polis*, you think me fool enough for anything."

"If you had said charming enough to do whatever you please, you would be nearer the mark," replied Sir Edward, gallantly.

"Well, we won't quarrel about terms, for I want to get home ; three o'clock, by the dial of the *Chambre des Députés* !"

As they pursued their course up the Rue de Bourgogne, "What a delicious place for a *galop* !" exclaimed Aurélie, pointing to the *trottoir*, unusually good and even in that spot ; and without further preliminary, off she started, to the utter consternation of the sentinel on guard at the Palais Bourbon, who rubbed his eyes for very wonderment, and to the inexpressible delight of Sir Edward, who, nevertheless, thought himself under the influence of a dream. On the Pont de la Concorde they halted again, and Aurélie leaned upon the parapet with her companion by her side.

A soft May breeze played lightly with the broad lace of the Baroness's handkerchief, which

she had tied round her head, not out of prudence, but because she knew well it became her, and the trembling rays of the stars poured their radiance into her upturned eyes. Madame de Cévèzes was very lovely in this position, and not by any means to be gazed at with impunity.

Sir Edward, had he been wise, might have felt that;—perhaps he did; but he still went on gazing, and, (what no Frenchman would have been guilty of) he remembered a picture he had seen in a village on the banks of the Rhine; a picture where a fisherman is transfixed in mute amazement at the aspect of a golden-haired Syren, Lurleya, who has just risen from the wave.

The scene, the hour, too, all conspired to bring on a dangerous train of thought. The waning moon, in the clear grey heavens, threw a veil of silver haze on all around, touching on the white columns of the Legislative Chamber on one side, and on the other leaving the dark trees of the Tuileries and the Champs Elysées in deep shade. To the left, the view was bounded by the Greek outlines of the Madeleine; to the right, the silent homes of

the Historic Great, half hid themselves behind the motionless curtain of the poplars. In front stood the palace "whence glory itself was forced to fly ;"* and in the distance, the towers of the antique Cathedral rose dimly towards the canopy of the sky. The river rolled silently beneath the bridge, or, chafed by the stone barrier that opposed its current, answered only by a ripple the low murmurs of the trees upon its banks. Onward it flowed, through the heart of the slumbering city, confined by its broad desert quays, and lighted by the twofold row of lamps, that on either side adorn it like a double diamond chain. Not a step was to be heard, not a form was to be seen, no sound of human creatures disturbed the stillness of the night. Sir Edward and Aurélie were alone.

Standing on tiptoe and bending over the balustrade, "If I were to jump into the river at this moment," demanded she suddenly, "pray, Sir Edward, what would you do?"

"How can you ask?" replied he, in a tone wherein I am afraid there lurked a degree more of tenderness than was called for. The

* M. de Châteaubriand.

Baroness untied the handkerchief upon her head, and, wrapping it tightly round the bouquet she still held in her hand, "There!" said she, flinging them both over the bridge, "you would not go and fetch that back, whatever I might say to you."

Sir Edward was in that state of feverish and unnatural excitement, when, if you had dared him to go and dance a reel in a powder magazine, with a lighted candle on his head, he would have done it.

Madame de Cévèzes saw this at a glance, and laying her hand upon his arm. "But I cannot let you do it now," she added, "for I really want to get home, and we have still a long way to go, to reach the Rue de la Rochefoucault."

Her companion stared at her. "But what made you then throw away your handkerchief?" demanded he.

"Oh! a whim. There was a leaf in one corner of the lace that irritated my eye."

"I heard, to-night, a lady who had been enviously admiring it, say, that in her life she had never seen a richer one."

"She might be right. I bought it yesterday for fifteen hundred francs. It was made for the *trousseau* of a German Princess, but returned, because it was thought too dear."

Sir Edward scarcely knew whether to be most shocked or most astonished at this spirit of wanton prodigality: *au demeurant*, he was considerably amused.

"You are a very Cleopatra," remarked he.

"That has always been my dream! Cleopatra! —Agnes Sorel!—Diane de Poitiers! What would I not give to have the wasting of the revenues of an empire! Instead of which—it really is too disgusting!—I am forced to live like all the rest of the stupid world, and even pay my debts as I go."

Sir Edward was about to reply, when the Baroness interrupted him, and directed his attention to a hack cabriolet that was at that moment about to cross the Place Louis XV.

"Let us secure him," exclaimed Aurélie, "for I have had enough of my walk in these thin satin shoes;" and running forward, "*Hé! cocher!*" cried the mischievous sprite, in an accent worthy of Déjazet, and, laying her own

infantine hand on the bridle of the broken-winded Bucephalus, she jumped into the crazy vehicle, before Sir Edward had time even to come to her assistance.

Between the loud fits of laughter excited by the adventure, and occasional apostrophes addressed, in the most approved slang, to the astonished coachman, our vagabond pair gained the top of the Rue Royale. As they were turning round the corner towards the Boulevards, the Baroness dived into the side-pocket of Sir Edward's paletot.

"*Enfin !*" cried she, pulling forth a cigar-case, "I have been trying all the other pockets in vain for the last hour ; but here it is at last, and now we may smoke in peace," and with these words, she selected carefully a cigar for herself, and handed the remainder to her companion.

"But I have no *briquet*," objected the latter.

"That is easily remedied ;" and giving, with her dainty fingers, a tap on the driver's shaggy coat, "*Cocher de mon cœur !*" continued the

reckless creature, "try if thou canst persuade thy impetuous steed to stay his headlong pace, and allow me to borrow a spark from thy pipe."

The light was communicated to the cigars, and after one or two preliminary whiffs, "Take back thy pipe, *ô vénérable cocher !*" added Madame de Cévèzes, "but moderate thy whirlwind course. Think of M. Delessert,* and have mercy on our bones !"

Sir Edward was astounded, but convulsed with laughter. It was the first time he had seen a lady smoke. As the perfumed cloud came curling out of Aurélie's ripe lips, and as she continued speaking, nothing hindered by the familiar weed, his astonishment grew more intense every moment ; and certainly into the kiss he could not refrain from imprinting on her hand, as he bade adieu to her at the door of her own house, there entered a vast deal of admiration, unmixed with the slightest tinge of reproof.

As Sir Edward re-entered the cab alone, "*Ah ! milor !*" exclaimed the driver, who, with the

* The Préfet de Police.

instinct peculiar to French people of his class, had instantly guessed to what country his passenger belonged “*m'est avis que c'en est une véritable de ce qu'ils appellent Lionne dans la haute !*”

Day was just beginning to break when Sir Edward reached the Place Vendôme. Dismissing his sleepy valet, he passed through the whole suite of apartments until he came to the door of his wife's chamber. He paused a moment ; all was still, and, laying his hand upon the lock, he stole noiselessly into the room. Opposite to the door by which he had entered was another, opening into the immediately adjoining chamber, appropriated by Sir Edward to his own use. Instead of merely passing through, he stopped, and shading the light of his candle with his hand, advanced towards the bed. There lay Mildred in all the brightness of her innocent beauty. Neat and precise almost to puritanism was her attire ; not even a stray curl of the silken hair had escaped the bonds that bound it ; and on the bloom of the downy cheek rested the lace of the cap, flat and unruffled as the plaits of a quakeress's coif. The soft breath came through

the gently-parted lips with infantine regularity, scarcely disturbing the covering of the bosom.

As she slept, looking so good, so beautiful, and pure, it was scarcely possible for any one to gaze on her without experiencing a sentiment of tender respect. Sir Edward ought to have been deeply impressed with the contrast, and so he was, but not in the right sense. He had already drank of the intoxicating draught, and his taste was gone for the wholesome beverage. The sight of his wife did not seem to put him quite at ease with himself, for, after gazing upon her for a very few moments he passed his hand over his forehead with a hasty, impatient motion, and proceeding into the adjoining room, closed the door of communication.

If Sir Edward was not positively in love with Madame de Cévèzeš, he was very nearly so. He could think of nothing else; and the recollection of her child-like figure, as it fluttered beside him on the bridge, but above all, of her ten thousand extraordinary whims and ways, filled his mind with strange thoughts and unhallowed fancies. His imagination, to say the least, was captivated;

but as he had never indulged in any regular habits of self-examination, he was utterly unsuspecting of any real danger.

The pretty daring with which Aurélie laughed to scorn things which Sir Edward had deemed sacred ; the bitter ridicule she cast on those who still upheld the right, and the position from which it seemed as though nothing was powerful enough to remove her—all this had enveloped our hero's senses in the kind of fascination that a rattle-snake exercises over a bird. He was dazzled by a glare, which, though baneful, was brilliant ; confused by the fumes of a cup which, though deadly, was delicious ; and to this cleverness of corruption, to this elegance of vice, he found no arms to oppose.

Sir Edward Vernon, as I have said, had been brought up out of the way of temptation ; and the consequence was, that, not naturally of a very strong mind, he was without any moral defence to oppose to the first temptation that might fall in his way. Madame de Cévèzes, too, of all women in the world, was the very one who was most likely to be dangerous to him, for

she possessed, to an eminent degree, that charm of forbidden fruit for which Englishmen have such a decided predilection. There is nothing through which our continental neighbours establish on us so strong and easy a hold, as through our frank and fervent admiration of their most eccentric celebrities. The undisguised enthusiasm which we have lavished on the most *risquée* of their actresses, and on the least recommendable of their books has, while it astonished France, taught her that the way to the ultimate perversion of our morals lay through the perversion of our taste. The *Mystères de Paris*, and *Mathilde*, (without descending to authors lower still than Sue, whom no one above a lady's maid would admit in France to having read) have furnished forth the matter for more than one young Englishman's waking dreams; whilst Déjazet, and a few others of the same *débrillé* school, realize to his mind the type of all that, if it originated in his own country, he would not dare admire. Our neighbours estimate these things at their exact value; we do not; and therein lies the difference. All the seductive viciousness of

Eugène Sue's Ursule, all the *entrain* of Frétillon herself, although they might drain a Frenchman's purse and ruin him in a pecuniary point of view, would never make him commit a serious and irretrievable folly, nor prevent him, his wild oats sown, from settling down systematically into an orthodox, *homme de quarante ans*, deputy, *Pair de France*, *Père de famille*, and what not—the whole achieved by an excellent match with a girl of seventeen whom he had never seen.

All the oddities, however strange; all the fascinations, however winning, of all the *Lionnes* of every class in Paris, would fail to draw a Frenchman into a hopeless scrape;—he knows the value of every one of these cat-like tricks; knows their beginning and their end, what they mean and whither they lead; and the baneful effects of the entire science are averted from him by that one talismanic word "*connu!*" But an English novice has no such preservative; his timidity even is of no avail; for those with whom he has to deal are bold enough to supply all deficiencies, and he is generally past reclaiming before he has thought of organizing any resistance.

Thus it was with Sir Edward Vernon ; Madame de Cévèzes realized a type he had barely ventured to think real, even in his dreams ; and he was incapable of bending his mind to any other idea, though he had not the remotest conception of being in love with her. Ursule, Frétilton, all the various transformations of the dear delightful, wicked tribe, seemed to him embodied in this one witching sprite ; and, as his head sunk upon his pillow, Sir Edward had visions of waltzing with Déjazet as Richelieu, and talking slang with Esther in the *descente de la Courtille*, whilst, in the intervals of his fitful slumbers, he clearly recognised, under the costumes of Esther and Déjazet, the infantine features of Aurélie de Cévèzes.

CHAPTER V.

TOWARDS the lower end of the Rue de l'Université, rather above the point where it joins the Rue St. Dominique, is situated a handsome hotel of the time of Louis XV. From the opposite side of the street, the eye, glancing upwards over the stone arch that protects the unwieldy *Porte-cochère*, may discern, at the end of the court-yard the ornamented façade of the house, with the large windows of its first floor opening down to the ground, and the magnificent iron fretwork of a spacious balcony in the style *Rocaille*. It is with the interior of this house and with its inmates that we would make our readers acquainted.

In a small room on the ground floor, a sort of

study, to judge from the comfortable rather than elegant way in which it was furnished, sat a tall, handsome man of, it might be, fifty, or thereabouts. A single lamp, its globe covered by a paper shade, burnt on a table by his side, and shed a dim light over the rest of the apartment. From the bronze clock on the chimney-piece had just fallen the silver sound of the half hour past eight.

The human heart is a faithful barometer of the mental atmosphere around it, and you cannot mistake its indications ; it will never point to fair unless the heavens are unclouded ; and not a pulsation of it but will warn when storms are in the wind.

There was a gloom spread over the whole scene, deeper than that shed by the deadened radiance of the lamp, and which told at once of broken repose and of hopes destroyed. It was not death that had cast its shadow on that hearth, for in all that surrounds and accompanies the Dread Presence there is a fatal majesty, a solemn awe, inspired by the idea of the irrevocable, which, the first outbreak over, gives to grief itself a deep stillness—the calm of entire despair. This was absent here. From the

first moment of entering the house there were signs unmistakeable of trouble, but of trouble brought about by human means. There was desolation, but it was the desolation that provokes revolt, and not that inflicted by the mighty Chastener, against whom it is hopeless to rebel.

Confusion and neglect spoke volumes at every step; disorder was evident everywhere; in the deserted aspect of the rooms through which you passed, in the lazy gait of the servants, and in the carelessness of their attire. But in the room of which I first spoke these marks of mental disquietude were still more obvious. Books were lying on the floor open, and their crumpled leaves downwards; the door of a closet in the panelling stood yawning apart from its parent wall, as though the hand that had unlocked had forgotten to close it again. On the table that supported the lamp lay heaps of tumbled papers, some, letters, and some deeds and parchments; there they had probably lain for a few days at least, for where from among them portions of the table appeared, a coat of dust was distinctly visible.

The habitant of this cheerless chamber sat in

a capacious and luxuriously-stuffed *fauteuil*, but seemed in no mood for tasting any of the material comforts of life. The right arm rested on the table, and supported the head in an attitude of profound reflection, whilst the left one hung down over the border of the chair with a listlessness difficult to paint, and which, in an individual so vigorously constituted, indicated a state of despondency almost inconceivable. Heavens! what weariness of spirit did that one limb betray! and yet, under the weight which seemed to bow down the whole form, how clearly its natural dignity was perceived. The brow, of an unusual expanse, was knitted by painful thought, that could not entirely disguise its habitual benignity. The lips, now sternly compressed, were evidently made to smile; and the eyes, clouded as they were by anger and suffering, had evidently been used to an expression of indulgent tenderness. Age had as yet taken nothing from, and it had added much to, a personal appearance fitted rather to display dignity than grace. The very silver with which time had interspersed the raven locks of youth, only softened a colouring which might otherwise have been harsh, and

gave to the whole head the mellow tints of a picture by some old master.

The half hour had not struck above a few minutes when the door of the apartment opened, and a servant announced the Abbé de Nangis. Rising from his chair, the master of the house advanced to meet his visitor, and shook both his hands with silent earnestness. The Abbé was the first to speak.

“General,” said he gravely, “although aware that you were in town, I should not have intruded on you unless you had sent for me.”

“I thank you much,” replied the General, “for not losing a moment when I did send.”

“I received your note only two hours since....” —and, turning round,—“down, down!” added the Abbé in an under tone, making useless efforts to drive away a dog, that, from the moment he entered, had persisted in fawning upon him—when, looking at the animal for the first time, he suddenly changed countenance, and stooping to caress the object of his previous annoyance, “Poor Nelly!” exclaimed he in an altered tone, “is that indeed you?”

The General, in whom our reader has already discovered the Marquis de Boislambert, passed

the toe of his boot fondly over the spaniel's silky paws, and, almost as though speaking to himself; "I cannot drive the poor beast away," remarked he. "She will not go from me; she leaves me neither day nor night."

After a pause of a few seconds, M. de Boislambert motioned the Abbé to a chair, and resuming his own, the General and M. de Nangis seated themselves on either side of the table, with the dimly-burning lamp between them.

It was a curious thing to mark the difference in those two men, both equally rich in moral fortitude, but the one of whom had acquired strength in the constant development of outward activity, and the other, in the patient labours of inward meditation. The *Curé* was younger by five or six years than M. de Boislambert, yet at first sight, he would have been pronounced to be ten years the General's senior. The few thin locks that escaped from beneath his black *calotte* were white as snow, and the high forehead was furrowed by the ploughshare of anxious thought.

They sat in silence for a few moments, neither seeming desirous to touch upon the

subject which lay nearest to both their hearts. At length, M. de Boislambert, making what appeared a slight effort, and what was in reality a violent one, turned towards his guest, and addressing him in a tone of voice he sought to render perfectly calm :

“M. l’Abbé,” said he, “there is but one subject of conversation possible between us at this moment. Do you know any thing of *her*?”

“If I did,” replied M. de Nangis, “I should not think myself authorized to tell.”

“Then you do at least know something?” interrupted the General, eagerly.

“Nothing!” rejoined the Abbé, with a sigh.

“Nothing?” repeated the Marquis, in a tone that showed how much of latent hope had been destroyed by that word: “what! not a guess, not an idea?” The Abbé mournfully shook his head. M. de Boislambert started on his seat. “Good Heaven!” exclaimed he. “Suppose for an instant that, driven by despair—” he shuddered.

“No, M. le Marquis,” said the *Curé*, solemnly; “she will not sacrifice her eternal welfare thus. I am utterly ignorant of all

concerning her ; but I *know* she will not abridge one day of a life that henceforward will appear to her due entirely to repentance."

"Repentance !" The General struck his clenched hand upon his forehead. "Repentance ! Heavens ! that such a word should be coupled with her name !" and, after a few moments' silence, M. de Boislambert took from the table a sealed packet. "*Tenez, M. l'Abbé,*" said he, impatiently, "there is a letter for you," and handing it to M. de Nangis, he abruptly quitted his chair, and began to pace up and down the apartment with uneasy steps. Suddenly, however, his purpose seemed to change ; and he established himself at the chimney-piece as in a position whence he could command every varying expression of the Abbé's countenance.

A momentary joy lighted up the *Curé's* benevolent face at sight of the well-known hand ; but this quickly gave place to a sadder feeling, as he marked the almost unintelligible characters in which his name was traced.

What consolation could any letter bring to him ? Was not she whom he had looked upon as his child, lost in the pathways of sin ? What

remedy could aught she might allege bring to her earthly ills? What that she could say would alter the fact of her having "fallen from her high estate?"

All these thoughts passed rapidly through the Abbé's mind as he looked at the unopened epistle on his knee. Not so with M. de Boislambert. Unacknowledged impatience and curiosity evidently struggled in his breast against the vain wish to appear unmoved. At length, unable to resist the impulse any longer:

"M. l'Abbé," said he, in a stifled tone, "you take less interest than I supposed in this communication."

Whilst engaged in its perusal, the General's eyes never left the *Curé's* face for a second, but literally fastened upon its every lineament. Little enough, however, was there betrayed. M. de Nangis seemed prepared for all the letter contained; and the only emotion the perusal of it called forth was, perhaps, a still more profound degree of that commiseration he had all along evinced. He was about to fold the paper and consign it to his pocket; his hand already held open the envelope, ready to receive the note,

when something, it must have been instinct, for he had not once looked that way, told him of the General's feverish anxiety. Without a word, he presented the letter to the Marquis's unconsciously-advanced hand ; and the fingers, trembling from nervous agitation, closed upon it as a hawk seizes on its prey.

If the Abbé could peruse with apparent calm this appeal from his penitent, it was more than M. de Boislambert could do ; and his ill-suppressed emotion broke out at every instant, and in a thousand different ways, as he read the following lines :—

“ Where are you, my only friend ? The only efficient protector in such an hour ! Why did you go from me ? Why have you abandoned me ? I was strong when you left me, and now I am lost. I have neither courage, strength, nor hope. No courage to attempt resistance, no strength to put it into execution, and yet no hope of pardon, now that I have erred ! To-morrow I shall be spoken of, so that you, and all those who have loved me, shall hide their heads for shame. Oh, Father ! Father !

do not *you* cast me from you. Pray for me, for indeed I have need of your prayers. I can tell you nothing—I can give you no details. A blind fatality, Heaven itself, (forgive me if I dare to utter this), Heaven itself seems to have resolved my perdition, by placing in my path just that one, only one, whose every step, whose every breath was fraught with danger to my peace. I can say no more—it is perhaps useless to have said so much—but nothing of all this could have happened had you not been absent. I should have flown to you; you could, you must have saved me. Oh! that fatal absence of yours! For the sake of my father, whose friend you were, of my sainted mother, of my lost innocence, over which you watched so many years!—for *his* sake whose threshold I can never again cross, and whose honour ought to have been dearer to me than life—do not desert my children—guard them from harm. Marie, above all! an hour ago I leant over her pillow, and did not dare imprint upon her brow a guilty mother's kiss. As I lingered by her bed a baby voice from her brother's cradle murmured 'Father!' I turned

round; my little Octave in his sleep again uttered the same word—Father!—Heaven! how did that one word call up before me the phantom host of all my duties! How much stronger than the blast of ten thousand trumpets did that infant tone convey to me the sense of trust betrayed and honour lost! I thought my heart must have broken! Had *he* been there, I should have fallen at his feet and told him all....; but he too was absent. I was alone!—alone with my guilt, my remorse and my shame; *alone with the sense of the Irreparable!*

“Had that not been, I *would* not have fled. I would have clung to the foot of my children’s cradle, and defied temptation to the death. But I have no strength for deceit—I cannot meet *his* eye. To-morrow I go forth from hence for ever, and then the punishment, the work of expiation begins. I have no more to say. I commit, under the consent of him I have most injured, I commit my children to your care. I know you—you will watch over them, you will shield them from danger, for their own dear sakes, and for the sake of

their most wretched mother.—Oh ! my once happy home ! Even whilst I write, every object on which my eye reposes recalls to me that which is for ever lost. If those who condemn the guilty knew what the guilty suffer, do you think they could find in their hearts not to pity ? Father—I can write no more, my brain reels with anguish. Have mercy on me, and pray for me.”

As he finished this letter, the Marquis, letting it escape from his hand, dropped into the chair nearest to him, with a sigh so deep that it amounted almost to a groan. M. de Nangis picked up the fallen paper, and fitting it into its envelope, placed it leisurely under the folds of his *soutane* ; a complete silence reigned for several minutes. The Abbé was the first to break it. Turning to M. de Boislambert :—

“ Was that letter the only one she wrote ? ” asked he.

“ The only one ! ” was the reply. Oh no ! it was enclosed in a note addressed to me ; ” and so saying, the Marquis took from his watch-chain a small key, with which he opened

a leather case lying on the table, and extracting therefrom a paper, so crumpled as scarcely to retain the form of a letter, he tendered it to his visitor. All this was done with a dejected air, that showed you the springs of energy were stopped, even in the most insignificant actions of common life. These few sentences were all the paper contained :

“When you receive this, your most guilty wife will have left her home for ever. I do not invoke your pity, because it is forbidden you henceforward to do anything but reprobate, and condemn me. I will not even ask you to consider me as dead, for it is equally forbidden that you should regret me. But, as I well know, that to your generous heart none ever yet made a vain appeal—I do implore of you not to visit, even in thought, upon your innocent children the sins of their misguided mother. I recommend them to you, and to the Abbé de Nangis, not from the grave, but from what is far worse, from the threshold of a life of hopeless misery, whither a single moment’s guilt has sufficed to lead me. I will not call down blessings on your head, fearful lest from

lips so tainted, even such an invocation might turn to bitterness; but will rather cherish, unuttered within my heart, all that may tend to increase my punishment; neither will I ask that my children may not be taught to curse my memory, for if a just severity inspire you, it can only be that such is most proper for their welfare; and if you are guided by your natural indulgence, that will be done towards me of which I own myself unworthy. In either case, I will be humbly, deeply, grateful. In vengeance I know you could not take delight; and therefore I cannot say to you, 'Rejoice! for it has commenced.' But from retribution we can none of us escape; and those are most wretched in whom resignation even cannot be entitled a merit, but who must look upon every infliction as too light.

"If you judge fitting to do so, I would beg of you to give the enclosed letter to the Abbé de Nangis; and now, God forgive me, for you must not!"

The Abbé returned the letter to M. de Boislambert, who silently returned it to the

leather case, and, locking this, replaced the key and watch-chain in his waistcoat pocket.

"How are your children, M. le Marquis?" said the Abbé, as though he wished to engage conversation on the very ground to which led the perusal of the two letters.

The General started.

"I know nothing of them," answered he, almost sharply.

The *Curé* stared.

"Nothing!" resumed the Marquis in a more subdued tone. "When I returned here, the first question both of them put to me, was —" his voice faltered slightly, "touching their mother; and—and I confess I have not, since then, felt equal to the task of seeing them, and replying to their enquiries; besides, to tell you the truth,"—his voice sunk lower still, and grew still more unsteady,—"there are certain likenesses, certain expressions of physiognomy that at certain moments play the devil with one's resolutions; and that, in spite of oneself."

M. de Boislambert ceased speaking. The Abbé fixed upon him a look of indescribable

astonishment. Their eyes met ; and, unable any longer to maintain the reserve he had hitherto affected, the Marquis gave way to feelings he had sought vainly to control. With a countenance pale from emotion, he seized in his own trembling hands the hands of M. de Nangis, and literally wrung them, as, with a faltering voice he began :

“M. l’Abbé, the time for concealment is gone by ; if I do not give utterance to what is passing within my breast I shall go mad ; and I know no one to whom I can speak but you. Your character, if it prevents you from sympathizing with those whom passion leads astray, keeps you at least from casting ridicule upon them.”

“It is true,” interrupted the *Curé*, mildly, “that I am ignorant of the wild impulses which every day produce such havoc around me, but I do not the less pity the victims ; and God forbid that I, that any one, should dare to ridicule those who suffer.”

“Well,” resumed the General, “to you I will disclose that which to worldly men I would sooner die than reveal. However much

you may pity Louise, you have before you a being whose calls upon your compassion are far greater still. Yes! M. l'Abbé, I loved my wife to madness,—loved her as no man of five-and-twenty *can* love. I was—I am still in love with Louise, and no conduct of hers can cure me of the disease.”

The *Curé* pressed M. de Boislambert's hands, and by the expression of deep commiseration—the kind of pity which angels may feel for men—diffused over his whole face, invited him to proceed.

“At my age, to feel this ardour is deemed ridiculous; but to feel it for one's wife would, in our system of society, be pronounced the height of the absurd; and, therefore, even from Louise herself, has the excess of my affection been concealed . . . Oh! had she known how inexpressibly dear she was to me! How I doted on her every gesture, word, and look—she never would—she never could have left me!” And M. de Boislambert, for a moment overcome, covered his face with his hands.

“My son,” said the *Curé* gravely, “ample justice will be done you now. She will but

too well learn to appreciate you. She will but too keenly feel the worth of what she has lost."

M. de Boislambert looked up, and shook his head with a faint smile,—

"Ah, l'Abbé!" said he, "you do not know the intricacies of human love when it is *true*. If there be one thing that harasses me more than all, it is the certainty of the fact to which you allude—the conviction that her misery will be doubled by the too late regret of all she has lost. You mistake me, if you suppose that any angry feeling can actuate me. I pity her from the very bottom of my soul; pity her far more than you can do, for I am better aware of what she suffers."

M. de Nangis could not conceal an expression of surprise.

"I see you were not prepared to find me thus," continued the General; "but there are secrets in the human heart of which you must be ignorant, and in which it would be scarce fitting that I should instruct you. You cannot know how little of truth exists in what women and boys daily venture to call love, nor how

sublime is the sentiment when it is sincere and true. Believe me, M. l'Abbé, if women could see things as they really are, if they did not, above all in their so-called attachments, pursue far more the gratification of their vanity than of their hearts, they would leave the Lovelaces and Don Juans to their cruel sport, and turn to those men who have passed the first hey-day of life."

"It is possible," commenced the *Curé*, "I can conceive"

"No ; pardon my frankness," rejoined the Marquis, "you cannot conceive, you cannot imagine what battles must be fought, what sad triumphs achieved, before this state of good feeling and of kindliness can be made the principal element of love. Love is almost always a noble and a generous passion in women, but it is one of the very worst in young men, and fosters their meanest and most selfish propensities. You do not, nor can you ever, know how much a man must repent of before he is able to forgive. . . . Before Heaven ! my affection for Louise has ever been, and is, totally free from vanity. Were it not so, I

could not speak of her as I do now ; but I have dearly paid for the right of being able at this hour to say conscientiously, I love her."

"Rely upon it," said the Abbé with real sympathy, "the recompense will not be wanting for such truly Christian feelings."

"A moment!" interposed the General. "Do not praise me for what I do not deserve. It is not from a sense of piety that I act, but from a profound knowledge of the world, and from excess of affection ; and, depend upon this, in a real knowledge of the world lies more morality, and, above all, more indulgence than is usually imagined ; as also, believe me, true affection comes nearer to religion than you, M. l'Abbé, may admit. I am a soldier, bred in camps, and, I fear, perhaps, less orthodox than I should like you to perceive. For instance, where I do not love—where I do not pity—do not ask me to forgive. . . I neither can, nor will forgive mine enemy ; and (M. de Boislambert's colour rose) it is to a sentiment of worse than unappeased vengeance—of vengeance impossible to appease—that I owe half the torments I am enduring."

“Religion,” observed the *Curé*, in a mild but firm tone, “requires nothing that is radically unnatural. Thus, it is not enjoined that you shall bend the brow, fresh flushed by insult, in meek humility to the insulter; but it is enjoined, it is expected of you, that, impressed with a due sense of your own unworthiness, and a due remembrance of your Divine Master’s humbly supported wrongs, you shall fervently pray that strength may be given you to forgive trespasses towards yourself, which you yourself might have committed; and forget injuries, which, whatever they may be, must pale in comparison with those borne by Him who was mindful only of mercy.”

“It may be, M. l’ Abbé, and such sentiments may come later; but as yet, I will confess to you, I do not even desire to forgive; nor does this thirst for vengeance arise from a selfish passion. I have told you I loved Louise for herself; and if the man for whom she left her home and me, could have made her happy, had he devoted his existence to the task, I do honestly believe I could, in this case, if not actually have forgiven him, at least have

sincerely wished to do so. But it is because his hand, vile scoundrel as he is, has been the hand to strike her down, that I pant for his very heart's blood as a tiger for its prey !”

“M. le Marquis !” interrupted the *Curé* in an accent of severity. The General started to his feet, and with his clenched fist dealing on the table a blow which made the papers fly about the room and the lamp clatter on its stand,

“Thunder of Heaven !” exclaimed he, his eyes literally flashing fire, “do not drive me mad ! Would you have me be patient under the infliction ? Smarting, from not alone the insult, but the injury, can you—dare you ask that every fibre of my frame should not thrill and quiver with the desire for revenge ?”

The *Curé* rose, and, standing erect in all the peaceful majesty of his calling, “M. le Marquis,” said he, “you will allow me to take my leave. If to the afflicted I may sometimes bring consolation, to the strong man in his wrath I can have nothing to offer.” But, as he was preparing to retire,

“Remain, M. l'Abbé, and forgive me if

I have offended you," replied the General, in an altered and desponding tone. "You should the more forgive me," continued he, with an almost ghastly smile, "as, whatever may be my feelings, I am entirely precluded from all possibility of acting on them." And seeing that M. de Nangis still appeared to hesitate, "*Mon père*," added he, forcing the Abbé to resume his seat, and letting himself at the same time fall dejectedly into his own, "set me the example of forbearance. If your mission be to comfort the afflicted, stay by me, for, Heaven knows, I am far from possessing the strength to which you would allude."

"But I fear," rejoined the *Curé*, "that what I may have to propose may be far from conducive to a good understanding between us; for, in order to know how I might be of best avail to all parties, my intention was to question you on the very subject which so incenses you."

"Even so then let it be, M. l'Abbé; you shall know all," said M. de Boislambert, imposing on himself an evident restraint. "At the moment of my arrival," he began, with

compressed lips, "I explained the whole to Sestrières, as my oldest *compagnon d'armes*, and the friend I could best trust. He undertook the whole affair, and here is the result: Chavigny (a nervous reluctance seemed to withhold the Marquis from mentioning his enemy's name) retrenches himself in a complete system of denial. He denies having any knowledge of his victim, strenuously denies that she is such; speaks of her in the most respectful terms, and utterly repudiates the idea of her having addressed herself to him on the fatal morning. Nay, more, he says: 'Tell M. de Boislambert, that should any one venture to couple my name in an unseemly manner with that of his wife, I am resolved to exact from them the satisfaction which I cannot admit he has any pretext for demanding from me.' "

"Then Heaven be praised for that at least," observed the *Curé*. "Her reputation is in better hands than I thought."

"Tush!" interrupted the Marquis, "of what use is denial? Is not the affair known all over Paris?—and yet," he added musingly, and as

though reasoning with himself,—“to do him justice, he has always shown himself too brave for one to suppose that this system is adopted with the mere view of saving his own life. He must have some idea that the affair may be hushed up.”

“But I thought I had heard it rumoured,” rejoined M. de Nangis, “that M. Chavigny himself had been the first to—”

“So he was,” ejaculated the Marquis, with an expression we will not repeat, “but how to bring that home to him? He told the whole, not two hours after it happened, to Pelletier, the banker, and to his cousin, the Duc d’Jéna; but they are both equally dumb. Sestrières saw the Duke, who declares it is all a mistake, and that whatever he might have repeated was the mere echo of a vague report, and not of Chavigny’s disclosures. It so happened that Sestrières’ own nephew, Gaston de Montévieux, was the only person to whom it is proved that Jéna had spoken; and Gaston says his first impression was, that the story had come direct from Chavigny; but that, after Jéna’s explanations to

him, he was satisfied he had been mistaken ! (This, I know, arises from a good and kind feeling, for all the Montévieux loved Louise like one of their own family). But therein lies the worst part of the history ! Every one eludes my grasp ; I am caught, entrapped, imprisoned in a tissue of sophistry and falsehood ; enchained by the apparent respect of my wife's reputation, and cheated of my just vengeance by the moral cowardice of him who has despoiled me. Oh ! Louise ! Louise !” exclaimed M. de Boislambert in a tone of indescribable anguish—“that you should have sacrificed yourself for a wretch who could not even appreciate your value, and who, to ensure the priceless treasure of your love, should hesitate to renounce fortune, country, position, life !”

“Rather thank the Eternal Bounty that things are as they are,” remarked the *Curé*, “the lesson is far better.”

“But his was not the tongue that should have taught it her,” replied the General.

“Who knows ?” pursued the Abbé thought-

fully. "Question not the ways of Providence, for they are as wise as they are inscrutable. I do not say all is, but all may yet be for the best, as far as she is concerned. In the mean time, what reason is to be assigned for the absence of Madame la Marquise?"

"Reason!" exclaimed the Marquis, with more bitterness than he had yet evinced,—
"Reason! what other than that which all Paris knows?—That she has left me! left her home, her children,—left us all!"

"But *alone*?" interposed M. de Nangis.

"Why, with Madame de Bois Lambert's reputation," replied the Marquis, proudly, "a choice of lovers would scarcely be afforded her, even in this corrupt town; and the constant presence of Chavigny (upon whom it appears suspicion was authorized to be fixed, though, Heaven knows, I would not have believed it) warrants the supposition that she has left her home alone. In these days of *lionnerie*," added M. de Bois Lambert, with acrimony, "circumstances more extraordinary have happened than that of a wife leaving her husband, and a mother

her children, for some wild idea of adventure :— some wish to meditate alone on the desert tombs of a by-gone race, or to study what, in the consecrated jargon of the sect, is termed the free development of nature, in the savage sons of the Savannah. But,” ended he with a sigh, which showed how quickly despondency got the better of even reproach, “ I little thought to have ever seen Louise the heroine of such a story.”

A pause ensued ; the *Curé* breaking silence. “ M. le Marquis,” said he, in a tone of sincere and deep compassion, “ and yourself, what are your plans ? ”

The General looked at M. de Nangis with an expression of despair that needed no comment. “ Do not mistake me, M. l’Abbé,” said he, solemnly, “ my earthly career is closed, for my energy is gone ! That which was the light of my life is extinguished, and I am a broken-hearted man. But although I can no longer be of use by my desolate, desecrated hearth, although all household joys are denied me, I can yet lose my life with profit to my

country, and die in the service of the King. My plans," pursued he in a firmer tone, "are to solicit a command in Algeria, and there hazard, against the first bullet, an existence that I can no longer support."

"I would fain not intrude my counsels on you, M. le Marquis," replied the Abbé, "particularly in an emergency where you must be a better judge than I am ; but I would suggest the propriety of watching over your children."

"M. l'Abbé," interrupted the Marquis, "each one must act, in circumstances of this kind, as he *can*, before even acting as he may think right. I could not bear her children constantly about me ; and the awkward cares that at best a father can afford to infants, are not sufficient to repay, from a sense of duty fulfilled, the suffering which the fulfilment of them would impose upon me."

In this, and similar conversation, the time went by, until the stroke of eleven warned the Abbé to depart. M. de Boislambert, taking the lamp in his hand, accompanied his guest

to the outer door, where he bade him an affectionate farewell, and, returning to his own cheerless room, many hours past midnight found the General still plunged in his sombre and sad meditations.

CHAPTER VI.

ABOUT a week had elapsed since the ball at the —— Embassy ; but the impression of that night had not faded from Sir Edward Vernon's mind. He had seen Aurélie constantly since then, and could not resist the fascination she exercised over him, and in which he himself saw no immediate danger. One morning he, however, commenced an attack upon his wife, in order to induce her to know Madame de Cévèzes, whom he represented as anxious to make her personal acquaintance.

、 This, Lady Vernon pertinaciously, resolutely resisted ; but, as she saw that her resistance was likely to produce a worse effect on her

husband than she at first contemplated, she felt herself obliged to purchase, by certain other concessions, the right of acting in this one particular as she thought fit. She began by virtuous indignation, which only made her husband laugh, and she would have proceeded direct to open remonstrance, if she had not been arrested by the sharp and peremptory way in which Sir Edward made her comprehend that that was what he would not, for a single moment, bear. I am afraid some very rude remark escaped his lips, for, into the tone in which Mildred said: "Oh! for shame, Edward!" there entered a peculiar kind of reproachfulness applicable even more to unseemliness of manner than to ungentleness of feeling.

"Well then! why the devil do you provoke me, by your absurd preachings and your puritanical cant?" was Sir Edward's gracious answer to this mild reproof.

"That last word is none of your own finding," retorted Mildred; "and comes from a disorderly clique, who think it witty to designate thus, all the obstacles which their own conduct would meet with in our sense of propriety."

"I'll tell you what," rejoined Sir Edward, sharply; "you would lose less than you believe, and might gain a vast deal more than you imagine, if you copied more than a chance expression from those it pleases you to designate as a 'disorderly clique.' "

Lady Vernon started back in undisguised displeasure. "What!" cried she, "would you have your wife copy such women as Madame de Cévèzes?"

"That is not the question," rejoined the somewhat abashed Baronet; "but if every man's wife were as agreeable as Madame de Cévèzes, it would be lucky for him—(and perhaps as lucky for her,)" added he, after a moment's consideration.

"Merely amusing and agreeable qualities are often dearly bought;" said Lady Vernon, rather sententiously.

"And God knows, Mildred, so is virtue!" replied pointedly Sir Edward. "Your thorough-going saints ought to live in a hermitage, and not in the midst of the world, where the least they can do is to render ridiculous those

who belong to them, as you did me the other night, by refusing to waltz with any one but your own husband. Husband, forsooth !” continued he, turning up his eyes with disdainful irony ; “ I thought I should never hear the last of it !”

“ There was a time when you would not have found fault with me on that score,” remarked Lady Vernon, in a far gentler tone.

“ Because then I knew little more of the world than you did yourself,” said Sir Edward. “ A month in this town forms a man more than ten seasons in London.”

“ I fear so !” rejoined his wife, gravely ; “ but rather say,” and her voice grew sadder as she spoke, “ that you loved me better then than now.”

“ Oh ! for heaven’s sake, Mildred !” exclaimed Sir Edward, rising from the breakfast-table in haste, “ do not talk any nonsense of that kind. What can your dancing with the men of our mutual acquaintance, like every other rational woman, possibly have to do with my loving you more or less ? It is so very

absurd! so very like a school-girl!" and the handsome Baronet rectified a fold of his cravat in the looking-glass.

Poor Mildred felt that it had a great deal to do with it, but she did not know how to express it; and accordingly determined to try the experiment of tenderness, unmixed with the least reproach. Going up to her husband, and laying one hand on his shoulder: "Edward!" said she, with more coquetry than one would have thought she could command, "shall we make a bargain?"

"With all my heart;—so it be not too hard a one."

"Well, then," and she nestled her beautiful curls into her husband's bosom, and looked up into his face with her dark blue eyes, "if I promise to waltz henceforward with every one but you," (a smile and a sigh, both, accompanied these words,) "what will you give me for it?"

"Why —" Sir Edward looked puzzled; "what do you wish?"

"To be allowed not to know Madame de Cévèzes," was the answer. "Even if my own feelings were set aside, you know what are

those of Madame de Montévieux on this subject; and we could not, being so intimate with her, and knowing Madame de Moreton too, we—that is, I—could not well, you know—”

“Oh! I suppose it is all mighty right and proper,” interrupted Sir Edward, disengaging himself abruptly from his wife’s caress; “and no doubt, according to your code of morals, obedience to the dictates of prudery passes long before the compliance with one’s husband’s wishes.”

“Edward!” said Lady Vernon, tenderly, and again drawing near to her husband; “do you doubt my affection? my—”

“God bless my soul, Mildred! I was not dreaming of any such thing,” interposed Sir Edward, with manifest impatience. “One really can say nothing now without your trying to turn it to a scene. You do not choose to know a person whose acquaintance I wish you to make. I have no desire to force you to do that which, for some caprice I cannot fathom, you resist; therefore, I do not see what more need be said on the subject.” He turned to consult the pages of a “Hand-book for Paris,”

lying on the chimney-piece, and did not see that Mildred's eyes were filled with tears. Without looking up from the book: "Of course then," continued he, "your saintship does not mean to join our party to-day?"

"What party?" inquired Mildred.

"Oh! a *partie de campagne*, to go to St. Germain and dine at the Pavillon Henri Quatre."

"I knew nothing of it," replied she.

"And would not have gone if you had," muttered he; "but as to knowing nothing of it, I am sure Madame de Brévannes talked of little else last night, at the Princess Schwerzinkoff's."

"You forget that Madame de Brévannes rarely talks to me, and that when she does not, I as rarely listen to what she may say to others."

"You would, with your prating, make me forget that the hour for starting is not far distant. Twenty minutes past twelve," said Sir Edward, pulling out his watch. "We start at one; good bye!" and he was preparing to quit

the room without further ceremony, when Lady Vernon advanced towards him.

"Then you will not return to dinner here?" said she, gently.

"Why! without being ubiquitous, I should imagine it would be difficult to dine in two places at once."

"And I am to dine alone?" added she.

"You do not choose to make one of us."

"It is the first time since we married," pursued Lady Vernon, in a timid voice.

"And will not probably be the last, my dear Mildred," replied her husband. "Married people really cannot be always inseparable." And, with these words, he was again about to take his leave, when his wife, again advancing, held out her hand to him: "Good bye then, Edward!" said she, in a faltering tone; but as, half relenting, he drew her towards him to imprint on her lips a parting kiss, all Lady Vernon's firmness forsook her, and throwing herself upon her husband's neck, she burst into tears. This was too much for Sir Edward's patience. Shaking her off rather roughly:

“Oh ! d—n it, Mildred !” exclaimed he ; “ this is too bad. It is all the fault of your absurd country education. But if you cannot be contented with having your own way, I own I am at a loss to know how to please you. I have given you that, so now pray do not torment me with any whims or humours that I can neither comprehend nor prevent.”

Mildred had sunk upon a chair, with her handkerchief to her eyes. The hasty closing of the door informed her Sir Edward was gone ! gone without the least regret, and leaving her for a whole day alone. It was, as she had said, the first time since their marriage ! and believe me, those things which happen for the first time are, in many cases, more painful than those that happen for the last.

Lady Vernon had behaved imprudently, but of that she was utterly unaware. It would have been far wiser of her to consent to receive the Baroness, and, under certain restrictions relative to the maintenance of her intimacy with Madame de Montévieux, to establish a visiting acquaintance with the fair *lionne*. Much as Mildred might be shocked by the manners and

conduct of Madame de Cévèzes, she should have avoided depriving herself voluntarily of the means of observing Aurélie's attempts to ensnare Sir Edward.

In all these defensive arts a Frenchwoman has a marked advantage over the less subtle daughters of Albion. She never retreats before her enemy, never yields her an inch of ground, but fights stoutly to the last; and, in this combat *à armes courtoises*, above all contrives that her adversary shall never have the advantage of her in amiability. Now in England, on the contrary, well-behaved, proper women are so very full of their own dignity, that they are at little or no pains to render themselves agreeable, especially if they have the slightest suspicion that their lords are not quite so immaculate as they should be. A Parisian will play out her game, whatever may be the odds against her, and it is ten to one but she may win it; whereas an Englishwoman throws up the cards in disgust, and thinks it meritorious to seem wholly indifferent as to whether she may lose or gain. Now, surely, surely, domestic happiness is worth fighting for, and it cannot be a moral or a right

thing to give up, without a struggle, the man whose name you bear, under the proud pretence that he is not worth reclaiming. Every human being is worth reclaiming ; how much more so then him to whom your life's lot is attached ! And what is more, very few human beings are *irreclaimable* ; but to withdraw them from error and lead them back to acknowledge the beauty of right, two things are necessary, of which, I grieve to say, too little is known in England ;—indulgence, and a conviction that the first false step is *not* irretrievable.

Lady Vernon had neither of these two requisites. If she had detected in herself any leaning towards indulgence, she would have regarded it as a crime ; and she looked upon, as a condition of her salvation, the steadfast belief in the eternal damnation of those who had ever deviated one inch from the straight line. With these feelings, she did not permit herself as yet to be jealous of her husband ; but she would never have dreamed of doing anything that might prevent her having cause to be so later. She was simply unhappy, because the vague instinct, so prophetic in women, told her some danger

threatened, and because she could not help perceiving that Sir Edward's manner was completely altered towards her.

Lady Vernon passed the day drearily enough, unable to occupy herself seriously about anything. She began to read, but her thoughts wandered from the page; to play, but the pianoforte seemed, like herself, out of tune; she tried to copy a flower from one of St. Jean's beautiful groups, but she so invariably miscounted her stitches that she gave up that, too, in despair. In short, Lady Vernon was a decided prey to what we are obliged to call *ennui*, having no word in our own language to express it. "What does that matter?" said to me, one day, a lively Frenchwoman to whom I made this observation,—"*le nom n'y fait rien puisque vous avez la chose.*" The hours had worn on till half-past four. Mildred opened one of the windows, and, from under the blinds that overshadowed the balcony, took a long vacant look at the sun-lighted *Place*, and inhaled the fragrant breath of the warm air that came, charged with soft odours, from the gardens of the Tuileries. As she stood thus she did not

hear the door of the apartment open ; nor was it till she turned round to leave the balcony, that she became aware of the presence of a visitor. She welcomed the Duc de Montévieux, for it was he, with sincere pleasure, but at the same time with an allusion to the events of the day which sufficiently betrayed her irritation.

“So, Monsieur le Duc,” said she, extending her hand, “you have not joined the revels of the Pavillon Henri Quatre, and can find time to come and see those whom others desert.”

Unwise Mildred, you ought not to have said that !

The Duke bowed with all the reserve of a well-bred Frenchman, and, without taking the slightest notice of the latter part of Lady Vernon’s speech, protested his surprise at finding Sir Edward absent, (wherein he diverged from the truth about as much as he well could.)

Lady Vernon took from a table some crochet work on which she had been engaged, and seated herself by the open window. Gaston established himself on a low chair opposite to her. One little, narrow, sunny ray found its

way through some chink in the *persienne*, and came playing the truant on the mosaic-patterned carpet between them.

"And pray," said Mildred, "who is to be of this exquisite *partie de campagne*?"

"I scarcely know," replied the Duke, "but I think it is just as well that you were not."

Lady Vernon drew up. "I, M. le Duc!" said she, with a something that approached very nearly to a toss of her head, "you know how little my inclinations lead me into that kind of society."

Gaston smiled. "Why yes, you are on that point more terrible even than my mother; and you know I sometimes even allow myself to differ slightly with you; but in this particular instance I cannot but approve, and wish that some others had acted with the same prudence."

"What do you mean?" asked Lady Vernon.

"I allude principally to the giddy Madame de Brévannes, who is too pretty, too silly, and too entirely her own mistress to be always inseparable from such a woman as the Baroness. A widow

of four-and-twenty should be very careful of her female intimates. One woman may injure her reputation more than fifty men."

"I confess," rejoined Mildred, "that the Countess is no favourite of mine; and I have wondered more than once at Madame de Montévieux's intimacy with her."

"It would be difficult," said Gaston, "that it should be otherwise. My father and her mother were first cousins; and after all, though she is, I think, in great danger now of being led astray, there has not, as yet, been a single breath raised against her."

"You appear to me to be all cousins in your society," remarked Lady Vernon, smiling. "Since I have been in Paris I scarce remember to have heard any one attacked without hearing it alleged in his defence that he was somebody's cousin."

"It is in some degree as you say," replied the Duke. "*We have families still, and names, which is more than the others can say; nous tenons à quelqu'un et à quelque chose*, and in very self-defence we are true to one another. But I dare say that what you mention must

strike a foreigner, and above all, an English person. In your country you live so much in public, your *world* is so very nearly synonymous with the *crowd*, that it must seem wonderful to you to find a set of people who live entirely amongst themselves, and rarely extend their acquaintance beyond the limits of their family connections."

"I will not only say that I wonder, I will also say that I admire," rejoined Lady Vernon, graciously. "But to return to our subject. Why did you not join the excursion to St. Germain?"

"Because I do not particularly like some of those whom I know to be participators in it; for instance, Madame Ferrières. That woman is to me perfectly odious; and I would almost rather be exposed to read one of her books than to talk to her for half an hour!"

"And she is of the party?"

"Of course! Is it not her office to be there? Whenever *la petite Cévèzes* has planned some more than ordinarily mischievous trick, does she not give herself the countenance of the ex-Ministress? Madame Ferrières has,

I do believe, been hitherto an honest, well-behaved woman (and she will probably find little temptation to alter her line of conduct now) ; but she is wild for notoriety, and of that the Baroness can give her, at small cost, as much as she may desire. Herself a *roturière*, married to an undistinguished officer of the Empire, she is delighted to be in habits of daily intercourse with persons to whom, whatever may be their morals, none can refuse the advantage of good blood : and thus, in this alliance, Madame de Cévèzes affords the sanction of birth, fashion, and *chic* (a talismanic word you do not perhaps understand), whilst the other contracting party consents to cover, with the shield of her age and her democratic virtues (assumed *a priori*), any too violent *équipées* of her high-born friend. Madame Ferrières, however, is not the only one of her set who would give up outward decorum to be considered as the friend of such people as the Baroness and Moreton. *Apropos* to that," remarked Gaston suddenly, "I verily believe this dinner at St. Germain to have been planned in order to *fêter* the Vicomte's departure."

“Departure!” exclaimed Mildred, “what, is he gone?”

“He left Paris last night for Alexandria, on a mission; and, to tell you the truth, I cannot see my way in the business. Moreton has hitherto been a staunch legitimist, but he is ambitious, and his passion for the Baroness is only equalled by his desire to become a political character. Now latterly, both Madame de Cévèzes and her mother have fostered these inclinations to an immense extent; and it is said, old Madame de Vallemere’s intrigues are at the bottom of all; but, well as I know her manœuvring spirit, in this matter I suspect Madame de Cévèzes herself.”

“Why,” interrupted Lady Vernon, “do you suppose *she* wanted the Vicomte to leave Paris?”

“I cannot tell,” replied the Duke evasively; “but I know that he has left it. A certain influential personage—not now actually in, but very near to, the ministry—who holds to our *faubourg* by many ties (although he has served under the present government, and probably will do so again), did, it seems, so caress and

cajole Moreton's vanity, that he persuaded him to undertake a diplomatic mission to the Lebanon; and thither he is gone, after having had a long interview with the Minister. To save *le cher Vicomte's* consistency, it was suggested that none but a member of the old aristocracy, a kind of descendant of *la chambre féodale*, could bring to a good end the negotiations in question—which, I believe, relate to the state of the Syrian Catholics. Well!" resumed the Duke after a pause, "Moreton will talk to the poor wild devils of Druses and Maronites, of Saint Louis, of 'the sons of the Crusaders,' of 'France being the born protectress of the Oriental Catholics,' et cetera, almost as well as Montalambert himself (and I hope less nasally); and, after a good deal of chatter, things will remain precisely as they were—that is what will happen *là bas*: as to what may happen here, that is more difficult to predict."

"But that is neither your affair nor mine," remarked Lady Vernon, gaily.

Her visitor cast a side glance at her.

"Perhaps not," said he; and rising, "I will not," continued the Duke, "detain you any

longer; I know that in this fine weather you dine early. But I must not forget the message my mother desired me to deliver, and which consists in an entreaty that you will, as soon as your drive is ended, come and take ice with her (or tea, if you like it better). She has suffered considerably from her *migraine* these two days, or she would have come herself; but I hope the unworthiness of the messenger will not prevent you from complying with the spirit of the message."

"Tell the Duchess I will be with her before nine o'clock," replied Mildred, as she shook hands with M. de Montévreux.

"*Sans toilette*, you know," added Gaston, opening the door. "We are alone; only my uncle Sestrières, and Madame de La Roche Bermont. Come in your bonnet."

When the Duke was gone, though Lady Vernon felt less *ennuyée* than before he came, she felt perhaps more lonely. Hurrying her solitary dinner, and lingering over her toilette, she did not step into her *calèche* until half-past seven. As she passed slowly up the avenue of the Champs Elysées, the sun was setting over

the woods of Neuilly, and his broad red disk, sinking upon a bed of purple and gold, was framed, as it were, by the gigantic arch of the *Barrière de l'Etoile*.

As Lady Vernon passed through the broad alleys of the Bois, carpeted with the silver blossoms of the almond-scented acacias, or stole through the smaller paths, but just wide enough to admit her carriage and where the dark branches of the trees met vault-like above her head, she felt that it was excessively agreeable, that the air was very mild, and that the drive would probably do her good; but of the thousand fair dreams that attend on such influences, that lurk in the twittering boughs, in the breath of the flowers, in the evening wind, of these, not one came to her! She turned away from the darkening wood to re-enter the town, without a regret for all those lovely little spots that the moon was beginning to point out to you as she rose, and that you could just perceive, in the intervals of the thickets and between the stems of the trees. Before nine o'clock had struck, Lady Vernon's carriage rolled into the court-yard of the *Hotel Montévieux*.

CHAPTER VII.

IN the Duchess's salon, Mildred found only four persons assembled: Madame de Montévieux and her son; her brother, the Comte de Sestrières; and her sister-in-law, the Princesse de la Roche Bermont. The latter, for some cause of which Mildred herself was unconscious, always acted on Lady Vernon as a kind of kill-joy; nor, on the other hand, did the Princess seem to derive any particular gratification from the young Englishwoman's society. The first greetings exchanged, conversation established itself upon the ordinary topics of the day. Theatres, dress, society, each had its turn,—without forgetting politics or scandal,—

when, in the midst of a tirade from Madame de la Roche Bermont, who sought to prove that unless the Duc de Bordeaux came shortly to the throne, France must be ruined in every respect, but especially in a moral point of view, a servant announced M. le Comte de Maugency.

“What?” exclaimed, in different modulations of surprise, every one of the party, except Mildred.

“Why, my dear cousin,” said the Duchess, extending her hand, which the Count respectfully kissed, “I thought you were still at Poitiers! Since when have you been here? What has made you arrive so suddenly?”

The appearance of the new comer was too remarkable for us to avoid giving a slight sketch of him. Colossally tall, stout, and muscular; the longest legs, the longest arms, the shortest waist, and the brawniest shoulders imaginable, were surmounted by a small, round head, that appeared stuck on as though by chance, and between which and the body, no neck or throat formed any visible connecting link. The face was not ugly, for the mere features were regular;

but a sort of constitutional drowsiness so entirely overhung them, that they might be said to be completely devoid of all expression, good or bad. This heaviness was evidently the marked characteristic of the individual. His voice was heavy, his intonations were drawling. It was evident that his perceptions lagged behind those of the rest of his species, and that he must take at least half an hour longer to seize a point than any one else. At the same time, this laziness of mind and manner was every now and then employed to bring forth some piece of unexpected causticity absolutely startling.

Answering Madame de Montévieux's question :—

“I left Poitiers three weeks ago,” said he, “I have been staying ten days at Mantes, and capital fun we have had. We had no less a personage in our neighbourhood than *la belle Marquise de Montdord*.”

“You don't mean to say,” exclaimed Gaston, “that Madame de Montdord has actually taken up her quarters in the provinces?”

“Indeed I do,” replied M. de Maugency. “She is at Château Montdord, and leading the life of a *provinciale*. Her place is not above fifteen miles from Mantes, and I saw her constantly.”

“Well, and what did you think of her?” asked M. de Sestrières.

“Why, that she is infinitely more agreeable than those who pretended she was not good enough for them,” answered Victor. “She is, I conclude, too handsome, and too clever, to please what you call *la bonne compagnie*, and so you have got rid of her;—but I can tell you she makes her house pleasant enough to lure some of your virtuous hangers-on from their allegiance; so you had best take care.”

“And pray how does her avarice like that?” demanded Madame de la Roche Bermont. “For she is a very Harpagon in petticoats.”

Before we record M. de Maugency’s answer, we will enlighten our reader a little upon the fair subject of this discourse. A lady of European celebrity, Madame de Montdord was a most remarkable, nay, almost an historical person. Beautiful, attractive, clever, delight-

ful, and more than merely well-informed,—she was, from accidental circumstances, not at all well received in the circles of Paris. The Faubourg St. Germain turned up their noses at her; the liberal party distrusted her indefatigable activity of mind; the prudes abominated her. She was, with almost royal birth, a *grande dame manquée*, and, with talents of a very superior order, a *femme politique incomplète*. Her life had been passed in the very hot-bed of political intrigue, with her near relative the famous Duc de Vallerand, and, like most of her sex in a similar position, she had taken all that was worst, and neglected all that was best in the science of Machiavel. All the littlenesses, all the intrigues, vanities, petty ambitions, underhand ways, manœuvres and backslidings of politics were familiar to her; but the large views, the elevated intentions, the gigantic plans, which raise the art of ruling nations to the height of a philosophical study, and place its practice before that of all other arts, these were to her unknown. Her famed relative, the Duc de Vallerand, tried every means of forcing her into popularity, but even

his all-but omnipotence could not succeed. Madame de Montdord was *distrusted*, looked upon with suspicion, and nothing could wash from her name the fatal stain of being a political *intrigante* of high life, though without any but political sins to answer for. Finding all her attempts useless, she left the capital in disgust, and took to the provinces, where she had more than one estate. Her favourite residence, however, was Château Montdord. The place was enchanting, and she contrived to render it doubly so to those (principally foreigners) who visited it. Her table, notwithstanding her avarice, was splendid, and the *bonne chère* of Château Montdord attracted many who would otherwise have been inflexible.

"I assure you," resumed M. de Maugency, "that there are few houses in which all the comforts and luxuries of existence are to be found so plentifully as at the Marchioness's château. It is a perfect Paradise."

"After the Fall," murmured M. de Sestrières.

"But, Victor," said the Duchess, "your

adoration of Madame de Montdord does not explain your sudden arrival here."

"Oh!" replied he, lazily, "I have just come from St. Germain, where I had an engagement to dinner with some one whose name I suppose I had best not mention here."

"How, in Heaven's name, came you to make one of that party?" exclaimed the Princess—"for I suppose you allude to the pic-nic of which Madame La Ferrière was to be the heroine."

"Pardon, Princesse," droned forth M. de Maugency. "Madame Ferrières, whom you choose to call La Ferrière—though I cannot imagine why, (that being the name of a very handsome actor at the Vaudeville, into which low theatre you have doubtless never put your aristocratic feet), Madame Ferrières was not the heroine of the party; that post was occupied by a person whom you dislike even more than you do her."

"Madame de Cévèzes!" cried the Princess, in the heat of the moment.

"I knew I was not mistaken," said the Count.

M. de Sestrières and his nephew exchanged glances. If the Princess had one foible more developed than another, it was that of professing, in her boundless arrogance and utter disdain for all those out of her own immediate set, an absolute incapacity for hatred. She considered her dislike as an honour, equalizing her with the object disliked: and had, perhaps, in her life never been entrapped before into avowing such a sentiment.

The Princess grew scarlet, as M. de Maugency, nothing heeding, went on: "As to the manner in which I found my way to the Pavillon Henri Quatre, it is easily explained. Hauteroche came down on Sunday to his father's place, near Mantes, where I was staying, and asked me to join the pic-nic, of which he was one of the prime movers."

"Was General Ferrières with you?" inquired M. de Sestrières, as though to turn the conversation.

"No!" was the reply. "There was no husband amongst us, that I am aware of—except those whose wives might be elsewhere."

"You must have broken up very early," interposed Gaston, anxious in turn to divert the current of his ponderous cousin's narration.

"*Ma foi!* I do not know what should have detained us; the best of such parties ought to be the dinner, and that was execrable."

"Indeed!" remarked M. de Sestrières, "I thought that the *chef* there was tolerably good."

"I dare say he may be," rejoined the Count; "but he is not the only one on whom the dinner depends; those who order it go for something; and the man who would be incapable of managing the affairs of the state, is not fit to order a dinner."

"For shame, Victor!" said the Duchess: "what an incorrigible *gourmand* you are!"

"I do not pretend to so much, *chère cousine*, I merely endeavour to eat with discernment;—but it was hopeless to have dreamed of a good dinner to-day: all those who ordered it were *millionnaires*."

"Well," remarked M. de Sestrières, "it is

the very first time I ever heard a long purse assigned as a motive for a bad dinner."

"Believe me," said M. de Maugency dogmatically, "if you want to dine cheaply, dine with rich men; if you want to dine well, dine with those who have not a *sou*.—Make a pic-nic with your Cræsus, and, whether you will or not, he will force you to spare your purse, for fear of the recoil upon his own;—but agree to share expenses with a ruined man, and you shall see your napoleons follow his out of the window. It was not, however, entirely the indifferent dinner which made us leave St. Germain so early;—it was also that Madame Ferrières, with the playful giddiness attendant upon her years, had chosen to forget that to-day was Thursday and that it is her receiving night. I dare say she might have thought it piquant, for that identical reason, to pass the whole night in the forest, and let her anxious guests knock vainly at her door;—but she expects an attraction at home that Madame de Cévèzes, for one, would not have missed for worlds." The speaker stopped, and looked up at the ceiling,

as though he waited to be questioned further. His expectation did not last long.

“And pray, what might this attraction consist of?” demanded Gaston.

“Oh! simply a man who would not be run away with,” rejoined the drowsy Victor. “M. Chavigny, who is to appear for the first time since his accident, at Madame Ferrières to night.”

“For Heaven’s sake, my dear Victor,” cried the Duchess, “take care that, with your usual *esprit d’àpropos*, you do not utter that name later within these walls, for my brother, just before you arrived, had announced to me the farewell visit of the General, who starts to-morrow for Algeria.”

“Well! but I don’t understand—I really don’t see—”

“You know very well, Victor, that you never will see or understand any thing till it is too late,” interrupted the Princess, anxious to revenge herself on her kinsman for the annoyance he had inflicted on her. “With what your fair friend the Baroness, to whom

you have sworn such devotion, calls your ‘*étourderie d’éléphant en goguette*,’ you would set the saints in Paradise by the ears.”

“My friend the Baroness!” ejaculated Victor. “She is no great friend of mine, by your showing, Princesse; and as to my devotion to her—I am a moral man,” (he cast up his eyes hypocritically) “and a poor man, and therefore cannot venture to devote myself to ladies of the world; but as to what we were saying, I repeat that I cannot see”—Before he could finish his sentence the door opened, to give entrance to the Marquis de Boislambert.

“Hold your tongue!” whispered the Duchess, in a half peremptory, half supplicating tone.

The reception given to the General by the Duchess’s circle, was such as only the most exquisite taste could have inspired. There was none of that officious *empressement* by which merely good-hearted, silly people, mark the first meeting after a great misfortune; and yet enough of effusion to make the object of it feel he was in the midst of those who sincerely loved him. Even Madame de la

Roche Bermont relaxed, in M. de Boislambert's favour, from her usual disdainful stiffness.

"Then really you leave us to-morrow?" asked Madame de Montévreux.

"At five in the morning."

"And you go—to Algiers?"

The General smiled. "That would scarcely be worth while," said he, "my destination lies beyond the towns you can have heard mentioned; I have the happiness of commanding an expedition against the Kabyles."

"Happiness!" echoed the Duchess, with a kind of shudder.

"Yes," repeated M. de Boislambert, "I assure you, that when a man, brought up in an active life, and who for some few years has led an idle one, finds himself suddenly recalled into activity, there is a feeling of excitement about the return to action, that approaches nearer to happiness than anything else one can conceive in this life. Is it not so, Sestrières?" added the General, appealing to his old friend.

"I am inclined to believe it," answered M. de Sestrières, with a sigh; "for I almost begin

to think the part you played in 1830 was the right one."

"For shame! M. le Comte!" cried the Princess.

"Do not let us talk politics," said Madame de Montévieux.

During this time, M. de Maugency had been plunged in what appeared a profound state of meditation; when all at once, tapping his forehead with his knuckles, "Well! now I do see!" said he, half aloud; and then, aware that, by this sudden announcement of his tardy perceptions, he had very nearly committed a monstrous blunder, he recommenced engaging everyone's attention to the continued recital of the events of the day.

"And so Moreton is dismissed?" said he.

"He is gone to pacify the Lebanon," replied Gaston, ironically; "but as to being dismissed, why"—

"I fancied he was dismissed, merely because he is supplanted," answered Victor; "but I suppose that does not follow." Gaston looked agonized with fear at what might come next; yet what could be done? no help was at hand;

on the contrary, the Princess, with her harsh voice exclaimed,

“And pray who is the idiot who has taken his place?” It was too late! M. de Montévieux darted to the side of Mildred, who had been engaged in conversation with his mother nearly all the evening; and, awkward as a man always is in these circumstances, and the more awkward, the more kindly he feels,

“Lady Vernon,” said he, hurriedly, “before I again forget it, do come and see the picture I spoke of to you the other day, of my great-great-grandmother, the friend of Madame de la Vallière; you will see that I am right about the likeness to my cousin Clémentine.”

“What are you thinking of, Gaston?” demanded the Princess, parenthetically, “friend of La Vallière indeed! a Montévieux!”

“Do go,” said the Duchess, who foresaw the danger; “it is in the boudoir.”

Mildred rose, and as Gaston held on one side the silken *portière* which hung the open doorway between the drawing-room and the little boudoir, to allow Lady Vernon to pass, these words, uttered by Victor, met their ear:—“He is handsome, this Englishman, handsomer far,

than Moreton ; very elegant and *distingué*—and as for being in love, he is perfectly absurd ; he not only *does* adore the ground on which she walks, but he shows it.”

M. de Montévieux drew Mildred into the boudoir, and, snatching a lamp from a console, he hastened to show her a portrait to which neither of them paid the least attention. He had scarcely said : “ Is it not very like, allowing for the difference of head-dress ? ” when, out of the way as they were—and they would have been more so, if the Duke, by wishing, could have made the walls open before them—the name of “ Sir Edward Vernon ” distinctly reached their ears, borne on the dull, ding-dong tones of M. de Maugency. This was followed by a profound silence, and then a low whispering ; but of the latter Mildred heard nothing ; her head reeled, her eyes swam, and the blood tingled in her ears.

M. de Montévieux replaced the lamp on a table ; it was no time for ceremony, or even for discretion. “ Courage ! dear Lady Vernon,” said he, with much feeling, as Mildred sunk upon a sofa before him ; “ do not heed my

cousin Victor; he is the greatest fool in Christendom, and never knows what he is saying."

"He knows it now," said Mildred solemnly; for the truth had burst upon her, and she knew and felt it to be the truth.

Gaston took both her hands in his, and pressing them earnestly, "At all events," repeated he, "whatever may, or may not be, courage, dear Lady Vernon! at this moment, for Heaven's sake, for your own sake, courage!"

"I have plenty," replied Mildred, as, with a collectedness which confounded Gaston, she rose and led the way back into the salon, where her deadly paleness was scarcely remarked, from the dim light shed around by the carefully-shaded lamps.

The party was augmented by the presence of Madame de Moreton, who had come, before returning home from her evening's drive, to inquire after her cousin the Duchess's health. Her greeting to Mildred was particularly affectionate and kind. M. de Maugency was sitting at a table, looking at some albums, but apparently much more taken up with some

knotty problem that was working in his own brain. The Princess addressed Lady Vernon, "Did you think the portrait of the Duchess (who by-the-by, *then* was only Marquise) de Montévieux, like Clémentine?"

Mildred, whose courage was simply heroism,—the sort of courage that a martyr would bring to the stake—and not that given by a knowledge of the world, by *savoir vivre*, could not lie. "I did not observe it sufficiently to judge," replied she, calmly. M. de Boislambert, who was deep in earnest talk with the Comte de Sestrières, looked up at these words, and you would have said there was a deep sympathy in his glance; but it was momentary, and the next instant he resumed his conversation.

His visit was not a long one: when he rose to say farewell, the bow by which he took leave of Lady Vernon, had something more in it than would be usual to a mere stranger; it was a shade—quite imperceptible; but she felt it, and a kindly feeling sprung up in her heart towards the General, as towards some one she had long known, and who pitied and understood her.

When M. de Boislambert was gone ; “He is altered,” said the Duchess. “He is thinner, and very pale.”

“*Ah, bah !*” rejoined M. de Sestrières, “he is delighted to get back to what Lady Vernon’s illustrious countryman, Shakespeare, calls ‘Othello’s occupation.’ I wish I were going too, to have a touch at those devils of Kabyles !”

“Do you think, then,” demanded Madame de Moreton, “that the loss of Louise inspires him with no regret?”

“*Ma foi !* If it were any other woman I would certainly say no ; but, to be sure, Louise ! I would have put my hand in the fire for her. No ! the worst of the case is, that that rascal, Chavigny, has placed himself in such a position that Boislambert cannot revenge himself on him, and that I myself was forced to be the very first to forbid his doing so. That is a bore, and must confoundedly bother my poor friend ; but as for all the rest, *c’est un vrai cœur de soldat*, and I am sure, with a campaign in prospect, he regrets nothing.”

“And his children?” enquired the Duchess.

“Oh, they remain with us for the present ; but he does not appear at all grieved at leaving them, they are so young. But that very circumstance makes me feel sure he does not regret his wife, as one might have thought natural, and even excusable.”

One by one the Duchess's guests dropped off ; and as Gaston conducted Mildred to her carriage, while closing the door of the salon, he heard a muffled exclamation from his sapient cousin, announcing that the light had again broke in upon him, for the second time that evening.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE *lionne* tribe in Paris is divided into a vast number of different varieties, and you have as little described any particular sort of *lionnerie*, when you have said *lionne*, as you have designated a Turk's cap or an amaryllis, by speaking of a liliaceous plant. There are the pugnacious *lionnes*—the real, *bond fide*, scratch-and-claw genus; and the languishing, ultra-feminine ones, who, instead of seizing on notoriety by the forelock, make away with, it as it were, by stealth. There are the singing *lionnes*, and the dancing *lionnes*: those who rival Madame Stolz, and those who are jealous of Dolorès, or Lola Montès;—for, remark, that the *lionne* never does anything in a pure or really artist-

like style, but always takes for her model some prodigious combination of boldness and bad taste. Then come the literary *lionnes*, whose dreams are haunted by the mawkishly impure creations of those most abject of the race of female writers, who, having no real beauty wherewith to attract attention, find a last resource in scandal, and become moral *tableaux vivants*.

To exemplify two of the different varieties, we will select Madame de Brévannes and Aurélie. The former was doubly a *lionne*, in virtue of her musical talents and in virtue of her pretended ill-health. The fair Irène was a *lionne souffrante*. She had all kinds of curious maladies, for which she employed all kinds of curious remedies and extraordinary doctors. The origin of the whole—so you were led to believe—lay, however, in the over-excitability of the nervous system, which produced at all moments the strangest phenomena. Nervous paroxysms, fainting fits, magnetic slumbers, were among the slightest of the disorders which caused the gentle Countess rarely to move unattended by a mesmeriser or an homœopath.

Her voice, though really charming, and her method, though really good, were probably not sufficient alone to ensure her fitting leonine rank; whereas, combined with ruined health, nothing could be more successful. A cavatina that might end in catalepsy, a ballad that might leave the singer at death's door, were sure to be breathlessly listened to. It was not 'dancing,' but singing, 'on a volcano,' and that is a sort of excitement against which Parisians of a certain species will never be entirely proof. Unfledged poets got into the habit of talking to the Countess herself, when she had sung, of the "song of the swan," at which she smiled faintly, sighed, or swooned, as the case might require. Besides this, when her health permitted, she gave other more lively tokens of belonging to the sisterhood,—such as riding on horseback, betting high at all the races, and paying a hundred francs to secure the withering in her hair of one particular prize camelia.

Madame de Cévèzes, as we well know, was, on the contrary, of the most approved and genuine species of devil-may-care *lionnes*, and

belonged to what one of the wittiest of modern French writers has called "*l'école tapageuse*."* She might, indeed, be considered as in some sort, and for the moment, the sovereign of this school; for what she did, few dared to imitate, and she was almost always left without a follower in her more desperate enterprises. But those who dared not copy, only wondered and adored the more; and the name of Madame de Cévèzes became a watchword, not only in the mere leonine set, but in the circles usually designated by the term 'fashionable.'

Madame Ferrières, who had many pretensions, and many ambitious desires, had one which predominated over all the rest,—that of being at the head of a *salon à la mode*. Her husband's position, combined with the particular bent of her own mind and faculties, had drawn around her that portion of the literary world, whose peculiar wish it also is to be, in general society, distinguished (in some degree) as *lions*. Nothing is much easier than in Paris to guess at once at the habitual tone and opinions of a house, from the literary stars most accustomed

* Madame Emile de Girardin. (Delphine Gay).

to shine there. But the two great distinctions are these: the men who write for writing's sake, and those who write to support an idea, or attain an end, wholly unconnected with literary vanity. The former (or ornamental portion of *littérateurs*, the mere *gens de lettres*) include, we may say, all the novel-writers and some of the inferior poets; the latter (whom we would style the useful portion) consist of men who, having an office to fill in the state, being either deputies, diplomates, or in some other way attached to public functions, have recourse to their pen either to defend the acts of the Government, or, through the medium of some grave science—whether historical, philosophical, or political, deeply studied—to elucidate its principles and lead the public mind to the habitual consideration of serious topics. These are never met but in houses either exquisitely *comme il faut*, or where the heads of the family are actively employed in the conduct of public affairs; the others, the useless members of the literary corporation, frequent chiefly those places where refinement is sacrificed to pleasure, and where graver thoughts and occupations

never interfere with the light and not always innocent diversions of the hour.

Such a place was the house of Madame Ferrières; and although herself what, in the main, might be termed a virtuous woman, her intimate society was entirely composed of the frivolous votaries of amusement *quand même*. There was no restraint in her salons, whence ceremony and etiquette were utterly banished. Riches there were, which, profusely spent, bought for the spenders notoriety, and in turn secured, from time to time, to those who profited, that meed of praise of which even the most famous stand in need. The good dinners of the General attracted the most obdurate of the critic tribe; and once softened in favour of Madame Ferrières' own books, it was no very difficult matter to obtain the like indulgence for some worthier object, who might happen to be in momentary disgrace, and who, in turn, helped by his presence to give *éclat* to the *réunions* of the ex-ministress.

The perpetual interchange of infinitely small good offices, established between this celebrity-dispensing genus and the book-making lady,

occupied more of her time than ever the ministry of war had absorbed of her husband's. But, as a recompense, Madame Ferrières' salon became an acknowledged resort for all the spoilt children of mere fashion. More than that, it was a place where people were said to amuse themselves, and to sup well—two things in Paris much rarer than is supposed. At Madame Ferrières' concerts all the finest singers sang their finest *morceaux*, and amongst the listeners you might be sure of seeing those whose names you had read in the morning at the end of the most dramatic *feuilletons* of the *Constitutionnel* or the *Presse*.

One only thing was wanting to Madame Ferrières' happiness; it was to secure a few of those who, instead of being sanctioned, sanction; a few of those who read instead of writing, and whom those who write aspire to behold in order to describe. Nor was this so difficult as one would imagine. There is in Paris (perhaps more than anywhere else) a vast desire on the part of almost every one, to step out of his own immediate circle in order to obtain a glimpse of the world with which he is unfamiliar, be it above

or below him, *peu importe*, so long as it be something new. The *lion* of the literary universe, and the *lionne* of good society (as it is conventionally termed) feel more especially this kind of mutual attraction. For the one, he sees in every *femme du monde* a fresh type, a source wherein to recruit his half-exhausted imagination whereas the other is simply curious to discover the mover of the thousand intrigues which have kept her for days and weeks in suspense, and thirsts like a child to find out what is hidden within its play-thing. With so many curiosities to act upon, Madame Ferrières found it no very impracticable undertaking to form a *salon*, where enough of talent should be assembled to render it attractive, and enough of rank and social pretensions to make it fashionable. But the utmost end of her ambition was attained the day that Madame de Cévèzes consented to become one of her *habituées*.

With the Baroness came M. de Moreton, and some few of the most dissolute and not least renowned dandies of the day. Then, also, (but to be just, upon rare occasions,) Madame de Brévannes was persuaded to join the group,

by Aurélie, who, however she might set every *convenance* at defiance, was not sorry to have one of her own natural companions, and a person belonging to her own habitual set, with whom to exchange ideas, and if the truth must be told, sarcasms, on the very people she was thus admitting to her intimacy.

On the day in question, that of the dinner at St. Germain, it must be avowed that the Countess's curiosity had been considerably excited by the prospect of meeting M. Chavigny, whom she had never seen, except at a distance, and she was easily persuaded to accompany Aurélie to Madame Ferrières'. Accordingly, substituting for their own carriages, by which they had come, the more expeditious conveyance of the rail-road, the whole party returned suddenly to Paris, and, the necessary change of costume effected, re-assembled at a comparatively early hour in the salons of General Ferrières' hotel in the Rue Chauchat.

M. Ferrières' importance as a minister had been very slight, and his wife's propensities were so much the reverse of what are styled *sérieux*, that he had not created for himself

any political connections, and Madame Ferrières' drawing-room remained strictly a *salon sans consequence*. Some few deputies there were, but instead of those whose talents had raised them to a really high political position, they were principally those whose wives were known to be handsome and reputed to be gay. Bankers, *agents de change*, and even notaries; dignitaries of a certain rank (not the highest) in the administration and public offices; these were the sort of men whose wives and daughters generally formed the female ornament of Madame Ferrières' *soirées*. Some foreigners, too, there were, but neither English nor Russians; and some few remnants of Imperialist families, whose titles or military distinction made up for their comparative want of wealth. In short, it was a gaudy, heterogeneous mass, forming what the French themselves call, *beaucoup de monde et pas de société*.

In this eminently commercial and *bureaucratique* set, riches seemed the *sine quâ non*. None could be received there, as the intimate of the house, unless he had the power of spending plenty of money, and this entire de-

ficiency of people, poor as to mere wealth, raised involuntary doubts as to the existence of that merit, which, in really good society, makes up for the loss of it. Madame Ferrières' pet authors and journalists were certainly not *millionnaires*, but then it was clearly seen that they were "had" for other reasons, and did not, whatever they themselves might think, belong to the genuine intimates. The total want, too, of all but young women showed clearly upon what conditions they held their position in such society ; and that, youth, beauty and fashion once past, no ties of blood, no family traditions were there to impose the presence of the aged. There is no surer mark of *rôture* than this absence from a *salon* of elders and dependents.

Sir Edward Vernon amused himself at first, in his quality of a foreigner, by examining the different celebrities with whose principal works he was tolerably acquainted. In one corner sat the author of *Eugénie Grandet*, astride upon a chair, devouring ices voraciously, and, with the bold daring glance of his Rabelaisian eye, scaring away with actual fright any modest

woman who might happen to encounter it. Further on, upon a sofa, close to a remarkably pretty banker's wife, sat, or rather lounged, a tall, clumsily built man, whose pre-occupation with the effort to appear gentlemanlike and well dressed was so undisguised, that it alone led you to remark how far he was from attaining his end. *Mathilde* and the *Mystères de Paris* had raised him, in the world of which we speak, to as positively unsafe a moral height as would have been, physically speaking, the pinnacle of the spire of the Strasburgh Cathedral.

In one of the adjoining rooms you might see a herculean half-cast, a colossus, on whose face three generations had not sufficed to obliterate the negro stamp, and from the forge of whose Cyclops' brain *Monte Cristo* had not yet sprung. Then there was the rough, water-dog-like looking Karr, the dreaded author of the *Guèpes*; the goggle-eyed and (in dress) worse than untidy giant, Soulié, and the Israelitish, humoristical dwarf, Gozlan; with a host of the lesser tribe, mere journalists, such as Janin, and others, whose names even are unknown beyond the *barrières* of Paris.

When our party entered, Duprez had just ended a cavatina at which the enthusiasm of the assembly knew no bounds ; for Madame Ferrières' *monde* was particularly devoted to the Grand Opéra, and professed to know every change of inflexion adopted by different singers in different famous passages of Halevy and Meyerbeer. As the mistress of the house came round to collect the praises due to the *virtuose* —“ Yes ! that is very well,” remarked Madame de Cévèzes, to whom she particularly addressed herself, “ but I do not see M. Chavigny here. I hope he does not mean to fail you, for I came on purpose to see him ;” added she, with the cool impertinence of her peculiar species. Madame Ferrières was about as much embarrassed as a manager who has promised some extraordinary “ attraction,” and who, when the curtain draws up, finds himself obliged to make a speech. Putting a good face upon the matter, “ Do not be alarmed,” replied she, “ he is certain to come ; we are such old friends !”

“ I have not the least doubt of that,” murmured Aurélie in an under tone, as, taking Sir Edward's arm, she drew him into the largest

and most crowded salon; "but I have always seen old friends of *that* kind treated mighty cavalierly."

Sir Edward looked annoyed.

"What is the matter with you, to-night?" asked Aurélie, sharply; adding, before he could answer: "I know what it is—and it is vastly absurd."

"And pray," interrupted he, as they seated themselves in a corner of the room, alone, screened by a huge china tub, filled with a gigantic rhododendron in full bloom; "and pray, may I ask what you have discovered?"

"You are jealous," replied she.

"Of Chavigny?"

"Certainly."

Sir Edward smiled. "M. de Moreton," replied he, "might have a right to be so; but I—"

"*Bah!*" answered boldly the Baroness. "Every man arrogates to himself the right to be jealous of the woman he is in love with."

Sir Edward was piqued, and he wished to show it. "I do not think," said he, "that I was ever mad enough to tell you that I—"

"Then tell me you are *not*," rejoined she, "and I will believe you."

These words were accompanied by a look than which that of the rattlesnake could scarce be more deadly.

Sir Edward bent his eyes upon the ground, and as the crimson flush of consciousness mounted to the very roots of his hair, "By —!" muttered he, "you are the devil!"

"It is true, then?" rejoined Aurélie, with an expression of feline delight, as the very tips of her tiny fingers seemed to shape themselves into claws.

"True!" echoed Sir Edward; and even then he scarcely dared lift his eyes to those glittering orbs that were shining over him in all the baleful brilliancy of triumphant spite,—
"True!—why you know that you have fastened upon my inmost soul, and that since the moment I first met you—"

"You have been insupportable to your wife!" interrupted the Baroness with her wicked laugh.—"Well, now! *Mesdames les prudes*, here is another lesson for you!"

"I tell you there is no poetry in Shak-

speare," said the harsh tones of M. de Balzac, close by them.

The Baroness turned round.

"Shakspeare is a philosopher, but no poet," repeated the same tones; "besides, he is not original."

"He is well enough when he is arranged by Ducis," observed a *Conseiller d'Etat* of the time of the Empire; "but otherwise he is not to be borne."

"Ah! you were talking of the loan," exclaimed a stone-deaf deputy of the opposition, who had caught the words, "Not to be borne." It is a crying shame, but entirely owing to the disastrous influence of those Jews, the Rothschilds."

The discussion now turned into another channel, and the merits and demerits of the Baron de Rothschild were canvassed.

"Do you really think him a clever, a superior man?" asked one gentleman.

"Umph!" answered a second. "He is as clever as you and I would be if we had the gold mines of Peru at our disposal."

"*Il a l'intelligence qu'il lui faut, l'intelli-*

gence de sa mine !" said, sneeringly, a third.

"*En ce cas,*" rejoined Balzac, "*il n'a pas la mine de son intelligence,*" and, as the words came hissing through the aperture left by nature between his two front teeth, the caustic *romancier* walked away.

Sir Edward was preparing to recommence the conversation with the Baroness, when she interrupted him.

"I see by your manner you are going to say something I shall not like, so you had better say nothing at all."

"I was merely going to ask you what can be the cause of your overweening desire to see this M. Chavigny?"

"Why, curiosity ;—a *bourgeois* who would not be run away with by a Marquise ! That is worth looking at."

"But it is everywhere affirmed that he had nothing at all to do with Madame de Bois-lambert's disappearance."

"*Miséricorde !* and you believe that !" exclaimed Aurélie, disdainfully. "What is the use of being well-born, if your own people are

not to get you out of scrapes, and swear, through thick and thin, that you never were in them? but we, who are *of* them, know their tricks, and are not to be done in that way."

"Then you think that the Marquise positively did go to Chavigny's on the morning of her flight?"

"Think!" cried Aurélie. "*Oh! tenez, mon cher*, your *naïveté* overcomes me. I am not used to it;—come with me. I must go and ask M. Sue when he means to make this adventure the subject of a novel."

As they approached the celebrated novelist, they heard the following words. A lady was complimenting him on the character of *Fleur de Marie*:—

"Ah! Madame," objected he, admiring all the time the monstrous red camelia at his button-hole, "you are too indulgent. I am quite aware that I cannot paint virtue. *Je ne réussis bien que dans le vice.*"

"*Quelle fatuité!*" exclaimed Madame de Cévèzes. "What can one say to a man after that:" and she turned back and sought out a seat at the remote end of one of the salons, but

from whence she could command a view of the first *porte d'entrée*.

After what had passed, and the ice being once broken, Sir Edward wished to recur to their late subject of discourse, and lead conversation back into a tender strain; but this appeared not to suit the Baroness, for, after trying for some minutes vainly to divert the current of her companion's thoughts, she turned abruptly round upon him, and, looking him full in the face,—

“Pray,” said she, “will you have the goodness to explain to me why it is that your countrymen, when they cease to behave perfectly well to their wives, always behave so perfectly ill to them?” Sir Edward looked puzzled, if not ashamed. The Baroness continued,—“I remember last year at Baden-Baden, the Princess F— had an *adornateur*, an English peer, who had married for love, and who, as soon as he became quite devoted to the Princess, led his wife the life of a dog.”

Sir Edward looked as though he were rack- ing his brains in search of an excuse.

“Oh! mind, I do not complain of this,”

resumed Aurélie; "on the contrary, I rather think it is one of the best things about you, and it is what I have vainly tried to teach Moreton. I never could bring him to show any thing but the profoundest respect for that little, affected, prudish goose, the Vicomtesse. I do not complain, but I want, as a matter of psychological curiosity, to know why, whilst our men conceive it necessary in being faithless to their wives, to compensate to them for their infidelity by every means in their power; yours, on the contrary, seem to think that, what the world conventionally styles an injury, is not sufficient unless accompanied also by ill-treatment."

"Why," objected Sir Edward, "it is difficult, when every feeling and every thought is given to another, not to hate the fatal tie which binds. . . ."

"Ah! there it is!" cried the Baroness, laughing, "you Englishmen are really the most *naïve* polygamists in the world. If the laws were not there to bind you, you would make wives of all your mistresses. But that is not the question; we never confound the one with the other, but look upon them as things, by

nature, incompatible as fire and water. *Les amours* are made for one's youth ; but if I were a man, I should always try to secure for my old age the undisturbed enjoyment of a comfortable pair of slippers by my own fireside. However, I suppose you are differently constituted ; and, as I said before, I do not complain of it."

"And then," interrupted her companion vehemently, "do you count for nothing the uncontrollable violence of one's feelings, the *entraînement*—the impossibility of. . . ."

"*Halte là !* my good friend," interposed Aurélie, "you have said the word—the *entraînement*:" and with an expression of ineffable disdain, "you are the slaves of your own passions," added she, "and may be led to the commission of any sin when they are excited. We, in France, are your masters in that respect, for we do nothing unknowingly, whereas you seem to me to do nothing *de parti pris*."

The contemptuous tone of Madame de Cévèzes had struck Sir Edward more than the import of her words. He was about to reply, when he clearly perceived that she was no longer listening to him. Her whole attention was en-

grossed by a person who, at the end of the three *salons*, was making his way slowly from the entrance towards the spot where the mistress of the house was to be found. Addressing one of her most cunning smiles to her companion,

“What need have we to lose our time in such discussion?” resumed she. “As you may imagine, I can have no reason for wishing you to be more tender to your fair *moitié*; only I hope, for your own sake (and the smile merged into a sneer few men would have had the courage to brave), that you are not jealous. . .”

“Not of Lady Vernon!” whispered Sir Edward hastily, casting on the Baroness, as she rose from her seat, a glance at which she could scarcely avoid being flattered.

Here was the mischief now complete! Sir Edward Vernon was not only over head and ears in love with Aurélie, but he had avowed his passion to himself and to its object!

The individual who had attracted the attention of Madame de Cévèzes, was a man seemingly of about one or two and thirty, but he might have been five and forty; for his was one of those faces which seemed to have been a

stranger to the emotions of youth, and on whose smooth outlines age appeared to leave no mark. His two greatest characteristics were reserve and precision. Although every feature was good, the countenance was so unpleasing that he could scarcely be termed handsome; and although every part of his attire, and every step he took, were irreproachable, there was something wanting to stamp him at once as a gentleman, in the most exalted sense of the word; a something that a *femme comme il faut* must have felt instantaneously, but that she would have been sorely at a loss to define.

As he advanced towards Madame Ferrières, the curiosity of those around was scarcely so sufficiently restrained as not to become annoying; and had the physiognomy of this new lion of the night not been impenetrable, we suspect it would have betrayed something nearly akin to disgust, at the indiscreet attention to which he was exposed.

“Chavigny,” said Madame Ferrières (who, amongst other leonine habits, had that of calling her male intimates by their surnames), “you must allow me to present you to one of

my friends—the sweetest, loveliest creature—Madame la Comtesse de Brévannes—*une grande dame du Faubourg St. Germain !*” and the latter quality being one which the habitants of the Chaussée d’Antin deem perfectly irresistible, the ex-ministress had introduced M. Chavigny, before he could find time to answer her, to the *nonchalante* Irène, who, half buried in a *bergère*, was, as usual, biting the flowers of her bouquet, for want of something better to do.

The two had not been many moments engaged in conversation, when Aurélie found her way towards them. She was alone. Fluttering in all the sylph-like freshness of her girlish toilette, she lent on the back of her friend’s chair, and every now and then addressed whispered remarks to Irène, which, however, failed to interrupt the conversation between the Countess and Chavigny, or to attract the attention of the latter.

Madame Ferrières rejoined the group, and, as her chief occupation seemed to be that of showing off her guests one to the other, she, with the good taste that generally distinguishes

the society to which she belonged, vaunted the musical talents of Madame de Brévannes, as she might have done those of a professional performer.

“Ah!” exclaimed she, turning to Chavigny, and as a further specimen of the good breeding to which we allude, “she too rarely sings at *our* request; but perhaps, if *you* were to ask her, she would not refuse.”

Madame de Brévannes looked almost terrified; M. Chavigny bowed in a way that was intended to quiet her apprehensions, and, looking for the first time straight in the face of her friend;

“I think,” said he, “that I should stand a better chance with Madame la Baronne de Cévèzes.”

Aurélie answered the glance by one as resolute; but Chavigny’s tone was so modest, his whole attitude so far from presuming, that, satisfied by the scrutiny of a single instant;—

“I would not have you try,” replied she, smiling; “for if you did succeed, you too would find that ‘one more such victory,’ and

you would be lost. A love-sick cat or a hungry owl is a somewhat more tuneful animal than myself !”

“ Now,” said Irène, laughing, “ had you asked her to dance the polka on her famous pony, Fathmé, or to shoot out the ace of diamonds at fifty yards’ distance, you would not have got such an answer.”

Chavigny slightly raised his shoulders, and, with considerable superciliousness, evinced his utter incapacity for judging of such feats. Aurélie bit her lips.

“ Those are not always the most unmanageable who seem the most unruly,” rejoined she significantly. “ M. Chavigny, I should have thought, might have found, in his own experience, sufficient to warn him against the treacherous depths of still water.”

“ Upon my word,” answered he, with Tartuffe-like humility, “ my experience has been so limited that I have no right to judge of any one from appearances.”

“ *Prenez garde,*” said Madame de Brévannes with a smile, “ *cela pourra vous mener loin.*”

“No fear of that, *ma chère!*” interrupted the Baroness, with a sneer. “M. Chavigny will not allow himself to be led beyond the door of his ante-room; we all know that now.”

The laugh that accompanied these words was so coolly insulting, that Chavigny could not avoid noticing it. Fixing on Aurélie a look that made even her lower her eyes to the ground, “Madame la Baronne de Cévèzes,” replied he, “has been so long habituated to play the part of a *lionne*, that she has forgotten that one cannot ask satisfaction of a woman, but only of her husband.”

If there was one thing Aurélie hated worse than another, it was any allusion to M. de Cévèzes. Carrying it off bravely, however, she turned round to her adversary, “And to ask it of mine,” said she, laughing, “you must go to Mexico.”

“*Mille pardons,*” observed Chavigny, with the same imperturbably cold politeness, “M. le Baron de Cévèzes is at Monte Video at this moment. He has just distinguished himself considerably by the manner in which he has

conducted a conference with Rosas. You do not read the papers, Madame la Baronne?"

Aurélie felt uneasy, and saw no resource but flight. Without deigning to give an answer to Chavigny's question, she turned on her heel, announcing her intention of trying her luck at the lansquenet table. A moment after, she returned. "I really cannot penetrate alone through the crowd," said she. "May I request your arm, M. Chavigny?"

"You may command it," answered he with the same eternal coldness that characterized everything he said.

Sir Edward Vernon had watched the Baroness all this time from a corner of the room, and an undefined sentiment of jealousy was gradually springing up in his breast.

During the whole time that supper lasted, Madame de Cévèzes was engaged with Chavigny in a war of words, in which he always appeared to leave the advantage to her wit, but in which, in reality, she was the greater loser of the two. She evidently wished to make an impression on him, and went beyond her depth because she could not be sure of having succeeded in the

attempt; whilst he, from under the cover of his seemingly unruffled placidity, studied her, and in a few hours found out the most hidden springs and secrets of her being.

The greater portion of Madame Ferrières' guests left her immediately after they had supped, and amongst these Madame de Brévannes effected her retreat. Wine, cigars, and *causerie*, for the chosen few who remained, prolonged the repast until the dawn of day was long past. As Aurélie descended into the vestibule, and felt upon her shoulders the caress of the morning sun, which poured its flood of pale gold through the windows, she turned round to her train of followers:

"Who will be of my party?" asked she. "I propose to drive off to the Bois de Boulogne, and breakfast at Madrid."

"I,"—"and I,"—"and I!" eagerly exclaimed half-a-dozen voices around her.

"And you, M. Chavigny?" added Aurélie, with what most of the bystanders thought great indifference.

"Oh! as for me, Madame la Baronne," replied he, (with a view to whom solely, the proposition

had been made), "this is my hour of retiring to rest," and, bowing profoundly, he passed onward to the *perron* and entered his brougham.

"Come, Sir Edward," exclaimed the Baroness, with her sweetest smile, and as though she felt her right to dispose of his services, "hand me to my carriage, and follow me with these gentlemen. We shall have a delicious drive!"

Sir Edward did as he was bid, and found himself soon after clattering down the boulevards, with the nose of his handsome English horse almost touching the foot-board of the Baroness's carriage. He lowered the front glass, in order that the morning air might cool his heated brow; and, half drawing down the blind, his eyes rivetted themselves upon one only object:—on the oval-shaped glass at the back of Aurélie's brougham, through which he could discern the crimson damask of the lining which covered it. Somewhere near that spot must be resting the silken tresses of that fairy-like head, the sight of which had sufficed to fright his senses from their propriety, and make him confound right with wrong, or rather, care no longer to distinguish one from the other.

Sir Edward fell into a train of musing thought, where every object was unconsciously coloured by a feeling of unacknowledged jealousy. Suddenly the words uttered by M. de Moreton at the Odéon recurred to his memory. "*Moi ou un autre,*" murmured Sir Edward to himself. "If such *be* the case, why need I despair? If it *must* be some one, why not me?" And in this diabolical creed, in this doctrine, submersive of every principle of honour or morality, did Sir Edward find, not merely a relief from present disquietude, but a pledge of future success, a reasonable motive for the pleasant anticipation of future triumphs.

CHAPTER IX.

ON the morning following Madame Ferrières' party, Lady Vernon was sitting in her own room, submitting patiently to the operations of her maid, and evidently thinking of anything but the plaits and curls the latter was arranging, when the abigail, summoned to the door by a knock, at which poor Mildred's cheek turned red and pale within the same moment, returned to her mistress, carrying a visiting-card, and saying that the lady whose name it bore requested to see Lady Vernon without an instant's delay. The card was Madame de Moreton's.

At any other time Mildred would have been surprised, and have stood upon Heaven knows what senseless rules of ceremony, but now she

hailed the presence of the Viscountess with instinctive delight, and desiring her maid to leave her till she should ring the bell, she, notwithstanding the disorder of her dress, sent a message to desire that Madame de Moreton might be admitted to her forthwith.

When Clémentine entered, Lady Vernon held out both her hands to her. Poor Mildred ! she looked very wretched, and the traces of anxious watching were visible on every feature ; and yet perhaps, never was her beauty more striking. Her long dark hair, half held up by the comb behind, escaped in heavy tresses over her shoulders, whilst the front curls, on one side brushed off from her forehead, on the other hung down over her pale cheek. There was a sorrowful expression, too, in her eyes, which, whilst it perhaps dimmed their brilliancy, lent to them an unusual softness. Over her whole countenance was diffused a certain sentiment of helplessness which is never unlovely in a woman, and which in Mildred was peculiarly charming. Her care-worn face and disordered dress presented a strong contrast with the scrupulously neat and fresh attire, and the serene, Madonna-

like beauty of the Viscountess. The latter, as she entered, not content with taking Mildred's offered hand, held out her arms to her, as, with a look and in a tone which could not be mistaken, she exclaimed,

“My dear Lady Vernon!”

There is something irresistible in *real* sympathy, and Clémentine had not time to repeat, “My dear Lady Vernon, you excuse my intrusion—do you not?” before Mildred was folded in her embrace. Few words were necessary.

“*Pauvre femme!*” said the Viscountess, in a voice trembling with unfeigned emotion; “you are very unhappy!”

Had this not been true—had Mildred really not been very unhappy—she would have been very much astonished, perhaps even, (who knows?) rather offended than otherwise, at the idea of any one intruding thus on her privacy,—on her confidence. It was such a very un-English mode of proceeding! She would have considered whether or not Madame de Moreton had arrived at the degree of intimacy with her, which renders it proper for one person to mani-

fest an interest in another, or, as it is vulgarly termed, "to meddle with what does not concern them." But Mildred felt thoroughly miserable, and more than that, thoroughly lonely; and when she saw Clémentine's mild eyes beaming on her through the tears that suffused them, and when she heard Clémentine's gentle voice reveal a perfect knowledge of her grief, she neither thought of etiquette, nor of the exact number of cards exchanged between them, but gave herself up to the feeling that she had found a friend: and, clasping her arms round Madame de Moreton's neck, found relief in a fit of unrestrained weeping.

"Poor thing!" murmured the Viscountess, as, with her own handkerchief, she alternately wiped the tears from Mildred's eyes and from her own. "Poor thing! I know it all so well!" And she pressed Lady Vernon's hands, and kissed her repeatedly.

The first burst of sorrow over, they prepared to talk more calmly. Madame de Moreton seated herself on a low *causeuse*, and Lady Vernon on a stool at her feet, but so as still to keep one arm wound round Clémentine's waist,

and her head on Clémentine's shoulder; for, the barriers of habitual reserve and constitutional shyness overthrown, Mildred felt an almost childish joy in the friendship thus suddenly offered to her acceptance, and clinging, child-like, to the object of it, became affectionate, and almost tender, to a person with whom, twenty-four hours before, she had been upon terms of ceremony, but whose reputation (a circumstance she never lost sight of) stood, she well knew, above all suspicion. Looking up at her new friend :

"How could you guess," said she, "that I stood so much in want of your kindness?"

"Guess!" replied the Viscountess, "*alas, ma chère enfant*, I knew, beyond guessing, what had already happened, and what is to happen yet." Lady Vernon shuddered. "In the first place, I was in my cousin's drawing-room last night, whilst that awkward brute, Victor de Maugency, was talking of Sir Edward; and, although I saw that the Duchess was trying might and main to stop him from speaking, I was not aware, until I heard her literally

whisper it to him, that you were with Gaston in the boudoir. When you came back to the *salon*, I would willingly have flown to you, and embraced you—I felt so well what you must be suffering! But when I learnt (for I could not rest, and I had begged an old friend of mine to tell me, early this morning, all that should have occurred last night at Madame Ferrières') when I learnt that Sir Edward had not returned home all night, and was gone off to the Bois de Boulogne this morning with the Baroness, I hesitated no longer: I sent for a *fiacre*, and, without saying a word to any one—without even allowing my *femme de chambre* to accompany me—I came to you, to see whether I could not be of some use. I did not know—I was half afraid, too, lest you might think me indiscreet—but the knowledge of what you must be undergoing encouraged me. I felt that what you and I know to-day, to-morrow must be known to the whole town; and that, therefore, there could be no room for affecting ignorance. I felt too, above all, that we were sisters in misfortune; and that I, more than

any one, had a right to assist, and, if possible, to console you. Those were my reasons for coming—have I done wrong?”

A warm embrace was the only answer.

“I must say what I feel upon this occasion,” exclaimed she; “I am bound to do so—I came for that purpose. In you, I thought I discerned a certain *raideur de caractère*—a kind of uncompromising severity, that would be of the greatest assistance to Madame de Cévèzes, and mainly contribute to the ruin of your happiness.” Lady Vernon stared. “Yes,” continued Clémentine, “it is for that I came to you. It is—(do not be angry)—it is to advise you, to prevent you from wantonly sacrificing your own and your husband’s welfare.”

“But, dearest Madame de Moreton, “interposed Mildred, “if Sir Edward can be capable of betraying his wife, for the sake of any woman,—but above all, for the sake of such a one as Madame de Cévèzes,—surely you would not have me forgive what I must regard as”

“I would have you do more than forgive,” said the Viscountess, putting her hand upon Lady Vernon’s mouth; “I would have you

forget — aye ! and more even than that : I would have you be blind,—or, if not actually so, at least persuade your husband that you are so.”

Mildred looked the picture of surprise. Had she been less unhappy she would have looked offended.

“But my self-respect—my dignity,” began she.

Madame de Moreton stopped her ; and, taking Mildred’s hand in both her own,

“Do not talk of your dignity,” replied she, earnestly, “or I shall think you do not love your husband well enough to wish to reclaim him. Believe me, my dear Lady Vernon,” she continued, with great gravity, “our self-respect, our dignity depends, in nothing, on our husbands’ reputation ; it is the reverse with them ; their honour hangs upon our conduct, our happiness alone hangs upon theirs.”

“But womanly delicacy,” objected Mildred.

Clémentine smiled. “Oh ! do not mistake terms,” rejoined she ; “it is pride alone, pride, and even worse—wounded vanity—that speaks from behind such masks. A wife’s duties are

sacred," pursued she, with animation, "and she can only have an opportunity of performing them to their full extent if her trials are severe. Where would be the merit of a wife who should be constantly loved? Suppose she lost fortune, health, position; in short, suppose that, what the world terms misfortunes, fell thick upon her; where would be her merit in supporting all these courageously, if she retained unimpaired the affection of the being who shared them with her? No! it is when robbed of that affection, that she has an opportunity of proving whether she be really worthy of it. It is a hard trial, I know; but so much happiness depends on it; and surely, when all is over, and the victory is gained, the recompense is sufficient to compensate for every sacrifice."

Lady Vernon had listened to the Viscountess in a musing attitude: at these last words, she raised her head, and, looking her full in the face, "And do you," said she, with a marked emphasis, "do you think that the victory is always certain? Do *you* expect the recompense?" added she after a moment's pause, and in a lower tone.

Madame de Moreton lifted her eyes to heaven, and, with a mingled look of hope and angelic resignation. "I wait His pleasure, who best knows what is fitting for us erring mortals," answered she. "I suffer, but I do not despair, and I even sometimes think that the day may not be far distant, when I may reap the reward of all my labours, of all my prayers !"

"And when that day comes," continued Mildred, without perceiving that, at the bare idea, Clémentine's heart bounded beneath the folds of her shawl ; "when he, who has so shamefully deserted you, returns to his duties, how will you receive him ?"

"As a mother would a child she has been in danger of losing," replied the Viscountess, her face beaming with pleasure at the thoughts of such an event.

"What ! and no reproach ?" persisted Mildred.

"Reproach !" interrupted Madame de Moreton. "Oh, dear Lady Vernon ! in the joy of such a moment, who could think of reproaching ? Besides, remember this well : that in the case

of husband and wife, every reproach on her part, only serves to diminish the force of those he makes to himself. Oh ! no ! if *that* day should ever come ; if Armand should ever return to me, my sole study will be to make him forget that he ever gave me cause to complain ; and I am so certain, so convinced, that this is the only way to ensure happiness hereafter, that for that reason, I do intreat and implore of you not to throw away the chances of —”

A violent ring at the door of the apartment interrupted her. Mildred started to her feet. “It is he !” exclaimed she, and the first expression of her face was one of joy ; but the next was one of anger. Madame de Moreton marked the change. Rising from her seat, “Dear Lady Vernon,” repeated she, in her softest tones, “before I leave you, promise me to be careful ; watch well over your own happiness ; it is a flower so delicate, so easily blighted !”

“I do promise you,” answered Mildred, kissing her affectionately. “For your sake I will be calm, and try to hide what I feel.”

“And no reproaches !” reiterated Clémentine, as, at the outer door she prepared to take her leave of Lady Vernon.

“I will meet him without one,” replied Mildred: and this was the most difficult of all.

When Madame de Moreton was gone, Lady Vernon reflected profoundly on all she had heard that morning ; and resolved, more out of deference to the Viscountess than from any conviction of her own, to try what the effects of gentleness might be on Sir Edward. But, as the idea was not her own, as she was acting upon a principle which had not originated in her own brain, and to the working of which she was an utter stranger, she over-acted her part, and from fear of not doing enough, did too much.

When Mildred entered the drawing-room, she found her husband reading the paper. Her heart beat high, and she looked deadly pale. Sir Edward was out of humour with every one, because he was so with himself ; and accordingly, he began by wondering why the breakfast was still on the table, when the water in the

urn had evidently boiled itself away. To his wife's answer that she had not yet breakfasted. "And what the devil," replied he, "makes you get up so late?"

"I did not go to bed," said Mildred.

Sir Edward stared:—"And pray why not? Were you at a ball?"

Lady Vernon's colour, and her anger too, were rising.

"I was waiting for you, Edward," said she; "and fearful lest some accident might have happened." She thought there could be no harm in saying this, and therein she was mistaken. Sir Edward had been so completely prepared for his wife's resentment, for a scene, in short, that he had determined, before-hand, to take the offensive side himself, and prevent the possibility of being forced into accepting the defensive one.

At Mildred's apparently very innocent words, therefore, he broke forth. Dashing the newspaper on the ground: "this is more than I will submit to," exclaimed he. "So you intend to transform yourself into a spy, and be in constant observation on my actions! I tell you

what, I will have no waiting and watching for me ; but will come and go as I choose, with the independence and liberty that belongs to every man, who is not hen-pecked by his wife—which I will never be. Waiting for me, indeed !” added he, sneeringly. “ I suppose next you will be coming to fetch me.”

“ Do not fear that,” replied Mildred, with a most irritatingly contemptuous air. “ In the places where you go, I could not and would not set my foot.”

“ The less we go anywhere together, the better ;” rejoined Sir Edward, losing all command over his temper.

“ As you please,” added Mildred, “ I shall see no reason to complain of that.” And, proudly rising from her seat, she left the room, and retired to her own, where, for some short time still, pride supported her against grief.

From this moment, matters went on worse and worse between Mildred and her husband. Madly in love with Aurélie, Sir Edward grew positively to hate his wife as the most evident obstacle to his pleasures. She, on the other hand, did nothing now to prevent him from

feeling her presence (whenever he happened to be exposed to it) insupportable ; and thus, this young couple, who, not two years before, had made what the world calls a love-match, were, at the distance of so very short a period, almost irrevocably disunited.

Towards the end of the month of June, Lady Vernon was made acquainted with her husband's wish that she should leave Paris, and, during the rest of the summer, inhabit a villa he had hired in the environs of Montmorency. Sir Edward himself was called to England upon business, but spoke of his intended absence as not likely to be prolonged beyond a fortnight, or three weeks, at most.

For some days previous to his departure, Sir Edward's behaviour to his wife had considerably improved ; but was met, on her part, by nothing but the coldest and most disdainful reserve. Appearances were, nevertheless, better kept up between them in this way, and quarrels more frequently avoided. Before starting, Sir Edward talked to Mildred about money matters ; she listened very complacently, and it was settled that he would probably have to write to her

on business, which communications she professed herself perfectly ready to answer. This was what the world calls acting like sensible people—which, when the last echo of the noise made by the wheels of Sir Edward's carriage was lost in the din of the streets, and Lady Vernon felt herself entirely, utterly alone, did not prevent her falling on her knees by the side of her bed, and giving vent to her feelings in a flood of tears.

They were the last tears she shed for Sir Edward Vernon.

CHAPTER X.

THE fortnight fixed by Sir Edward as the term of his absence had elapsed, and Mildred, for the last ten days, had been established at her *campagne*. The place was certainly very lovely, and, for any one who really loved the country, would have been a spot to live and die in. The house itself was arranged and furnished *à l'Anglaise*, in every respect but as to carpets; of these, there were none; but then the exterior heat of the season rendered coolness in-doors a decided requisite, and the mirror-like smoothness of the inlaid and polished *parquets* amply compensated for the want of any woollen covering. The windows of the drawing-room, and of a boudoir annexed to it,

opened upon a vast lawn, fringed at the opposite side by a small clustering wood, through which countless little mazy, violet-scented paths went capriciously meandering. In the middle of this *tapis vert* was a stone basin, without a *jet d'eau*, in the clear water of which might be perceived the Iris-tinted scales of a few half-forgotten trout. Scattered here and there about the green expanse, were a few isolated trees, such as the rose-blossomed acacia, the catalpa, and, close by the pond, a magnificent weeping willow.

To the left of the house, a superb avenue of secular lime-trees led to the spot where the entrance-gate had originally been, and where it still remained; although no longer of any use, since the house had been (some sixty years before) rebuilt, and disposed so as to have its *perron* and vestibule on the opposite, or court side, instead of being approached from the garden. Still, there remained the lime avenue, opening at one end upon nothing but the broad gravel walk that skirted the dwelling, and on the other, terminating in the great iron *grille* which heretofore ad-

mitted the equipage of the owner of the domain.

This *grille* opened upon a sort of lane—if a lane could be said to exist any where but in England—the left extremity of which merged into a principal road through the forest; in fact, the *grande route* of the village to Paris. On the right hand, the lane, skirting along the outer wall of the premises, plunged into the very depths of the forest, and led into thickets and copses but little visited by the rustivating population of the neighbouring metropolis.

There were so many smaller gates leading from the park into the forest, that the *grande grille*, as it was called, had not been put into requisition for years; the lock and hinges were rusted, and it was much if any of the successive proprietors of the mansion ever lingered behind its green painted bars to watch the reapers, upon harvest evenings, returning home through the lane.

There was about the lawn something very beautiful in these first brilliant days of July. When, from the intense blue of the noon-day

sky, the sun shone out in his burning glory, the broad expanse seemed to glow beneath his rays ; and, as you lay on the grass, you saw the air around literally quivering with the teeming of hot vapour, and the hum of the insects droned in your ears like the distant sound of bells in a dream.

Seen from behind the Italian blinds of the drawing-room windows, this lawn at mid-day was no unpleasant sight. But still more lovely was it at night, when the moon threw her white floating veil over the whole, and the few trees, dotted here and there, stood forth on the silvered surface, with the trembling shadows of their leafy boughs shaking like phantom draperies. Then, as you sat round the table by the lamp, you felt, through the widely-opened casement, the night air come, wafting on its cool breath the luscious scent of the limes ; and from the woods, after the nightingale was hushed, you might hear the low, wailing note of the eve-jar, or the more cheerful sound of the little tinkling bells, as the waggoners drove their teams through the forest.

It would perhaps have been better for Lady

Vernon had she never learned to love the sweet harmonies of nature,—had she never found out the thousand secrets borne upon the sighs of the evening wind, and on the rays of the rising moon as it played with the shadow of the willow branches in the water. But Lady Vernon did learn all this, and she grew to find solace and delight in things which had hitherto seemed to her irksome. She would, for long hours together, wander through the forest glades, sometimes sitting on the brown moss at the foot of the trees, and musingly uprooting the tiny herbs and flowers; sometimes inhaling with mute rapture the aromatic perfumes of the woods, as, indolently reclining on the cushions of her *calèche*, she allowed herself to be borne onward, little caring whither. Her solitude was now enlivened.

In all these excursions, was Mildred always alone? No! she had companions. There would be small harm in that;—but she had *a* companion—one who scarcely ever left her side, and in whose society she unconsciously learned to comprehend that of which she had been

ignorant, and to love that, the sole charm of which, to her, was, in fact, derived from his presence.

Gaston de Montévieux, if he had been divested of some of the prejudices belonging to his country and his caste, would have been about as perfect a *preux chevalier* as one could well meet. His faults came so entirely from his opinions, and these were so inherent to his very nature, that one might almost have called his defects constitutional; but his good qualities outweighed them even in a greater degree than he himself was aware of.

Like all Frenchmen of his age, and notwithstanding his good breeding and good taste, he had a decided wish to be thought, morally, a vast deal worse than he really was, and he ended by being himself pretty well convinced of that of which he sought to persuade others. One of the prime articles of faith of the set amongst which, notwithstanding his mother and the Abbé, Gaston lived, was that of the frailty of woman-kind; and although he had, now and then, some vague presentiment that there might

exist a woman who practised virtue for its own sake, he wanted courage sufficient to advance or maintain such an extraordinary opinion.

M. de Montévreux, with remarkable talents, and capacity for almost anything, felt himself shut out from the adoption of every career, by his political opinions. His activity, therefore, was almost entirely concentrated upon the pursuit of pleasures of that kind into which men of a superior stamp often throw as great a sum of intelligence as would be necessary to govern the affairs of a nation.

Lady Vernon had arrested Gaston's attention at first-sight. It was not so much her beauty—although that struck him as remarkable—as a certain air of purity and freshness, that, without his avowing it to himself, brought to his mind a promise of something hitherto unknown and unsuspected.

He clearly perceived that, in her, he had found, *en fait de corruption*, about as near an approach to Leibnitz's *tabula rasa* as it would ever be given him to contemplate in this nether world; and he consequently determined to watch what would be the impression gradually

and imperceptibly produced on her mind by all that was happening around her.

As soon as Mildred was settled at Montmorency, each succeeding day brought with it the Duc de Montévreux. Scarcely a day passed, it is true, without the Duchesses also coming; besides Madame de Moreton, and one or two other intimates; but Gaston had always some pretext which rendered his presence necessary at the very times when the rest of Lady Vernon's friends were either gone, or not yet come.

The consequence was, that, at the end of a fortnight, Gaston seemed to her about as indispensable a part of the *campagne* as the lime avenue or the house itself; and she was herself unconsciously aiding and abetting his plans, by eternally employing him upon all sorts of commissions, which necessitated his passing a vast deal more than half his time at the château.

So she went on, from day to day, accustoming herself more and more to Gaston's society, and as far from adverting to any harm that might accrue to her from it, as she was the first moment she met M. de Montévreux in his mother's *salon*.

At the end of the third week in July, Sir Edward was not yet returned, but Mildred had received a letter from him, dated Dieppe, in which he informed her that, having been detained in London by rather a serious indisposition, the doctors had ordered for him the sea air for some weeks, and, towards the middle of the ensuing month, sea bathing; consequently Sir Edward did not expect to rejoin Lady Vernon before the end of August, or the beginning of September. She resigned herself with ease, not only to the continuance of the separation, but to the prolongation of what she would previously have termed her solitude.

Lady Vernon was perfectly happy; much happier than she should have been, consistently with her own safety, and considering what had occurred. She passed the greater part of her time in the society of the Duc de Montévreux, or in unconsciously speculating, during his absence, on the period of his return. And yet, Mildred was not the least in the world interested in Gaston, otherwise than as a kind and agreeable companion, who had mainly contributed to

render her *séjour de campagne* pleasant, and had taught her to find delight in solitude !

One day that the heat was not insupportable, Mildred had strolled out before dinner, alone, with her *tapisserie* in her hand. After having sat for some time on a bench, in the little wood at the end of the lawn, she rose, and leaving her work on the seat, strolled onwards towards the *grande grille*. When she arrived there, the glimpse of the forest beyond was so inviting that Lady Vernon determined to prolong her excursion ; and, opening one of the small park-gates, she stepped out into the lane. At the right hand, a group of peasants were assembled laughing and chattering, and Mildred, to avoid them, turned to the left. A few minutes brought her to the *grande route* we have mentioned, and she decided to cross it, and gain the depths of the wood beyond.

Before crossing, however, she walked forward a few steps to reconnoitre, and be sure that she did not lose her way in returning. The road, which ascended slowly towards this spot, was bordered on both sides by the forest ; only, at Mildred's side, this was little more than

a mere shrubbery, through which, at the distance of some yards, you saw the park wall of her temporary domain.

At the moment when Mildred was about to cross, a carriage was driving up the road. The horses slackened their pace imperceptibly, as they felt the gentle acclivity swelling beneath their feet, so that Lady Vernon had time to examine the equipage. It was a dark brown *calèche*, with servants in handsome liveries, and everything extremely well appointed. Inside was only a middle-aged female, apparently a governess, and two beautifully dressed children, a boy and girl. They looked about the ages of five and six, and were, seemingly, in their infantine turbulence, a cause of great trepidation to their companion, who appeared alarmed at every step, lest they should fall from the carriage.

Mildred could not forbear giving a good-natured smile to the young cherubs as they passed, but, as the coachman whipped his horses, and forced them up the hill at a trot, she thought she heard, close by her, a low cry—a suppressed groan. Her first feeling was one of fear, and, turning back, she began to retrace her

steps towards the lane, but she had not advanced more than the distance of a yard, when the cause of what she had heard was revealed to her.

At the foot of a tree, almost close to the edge of the road, lay a female, clothed in deep mourning. Lady Vernon flew to her, and, kneeling down by her side, proceeded to examine whether she were alive or dead. Life was not extinct, but she was perfectly insensible. She had probably fainted, and what Mildred had heard was an inarticulate demand for help. Lady Vernon looked around; not a soul was near, and she was dependent entirely on her own efforts for restoring consciousness to the stranger. She had no means at hand of doing so effectually or promptly; no *flacon*, nothing that could assist her in any way.

She first untied the bonnet, and applied herself resolutely to chafing the hands and temples of her patient—it was all she could do; but, while doing so, she could not avoid noticing the remarkable appearance of the person with whom she had so singularly been brought into contact.

The stranger was a young woman, exceedingly

tall, much above the middle height, slight to positive thinness, but bearing about her whole person signs of aristocratic origin, so marked as to be almost curious. She was not, perhaps, exactly handsome, but much too distinguished to have passed any where unnoticed. Her features were almost those of an Arab, so peculiar was the eastern fineness of each of them. Her head, small to a fault, was covered by a mass of long, thick, soft hair, the raven hue of which never coloured the tresses of a daughter of our northern climes; and the severe and somewhat sharp outline of the delicate aquiline nose, and the long, almond shape of the closed eyes, together with the narrowness of the high forehead, and the tenuity of the exquisitely-chiselled lips, all seemed to indicate the presence of the desert blood.

Notwithstanding, too, the pallor which momentarily overspread her skin, it could be perceived that it also was of a colour rarely, if ever, visible in a European. Her dress was of a plainness that at once arrests a woman's eye, and, from the rich simplicity of every article of her attire, Mildred was convinced she held in

her arms not only a gentlewoman, (the face and figure witnessed that), but a person in an elevated position as to fortune.

At the end of about half an hour, the sufferer evinced signs of returning consciousness. Before life had well come back, a few indistinct sounds escaped her lips, amongst which, all that Lady Vernon seized was the name of 'Marie.' When she became perfectly reanimated, the sight of a stranger by her side appeared to alarm her, but Mildred's first words of explanation dispelled her apprehension, and she listened with grateful attention to Lady Vernon's account of what had occurred.

When Mildred mentioned the circumstance of a carriage having passed at the moment, which had perhaps prevented her from hearing the first cry for assistance, the stranger buried her face in her handkerchief, and then, uncovering her eyes streaming with tears :

"Have you any children?" asked she, suddenly seizing Lady Vernon's hand. To the latter's negative answer : "Ah ! then you cannot understand me," said she, turning aside, and wiping the traces of weeping from her face.

"I think I can, notwithstanding," urged Mildred, gently. "A mother's grief is comprehensible to all. And you—are a mother?" added she, hesitatingly.

"I *was* one," replied the stranger, pointing to her sable dress; "but I have lost all; and the sight of those children—so like my own!"—She stopped. "You know all," resumed she, and, with a violent effort, re-adjusting her toilette, and replacing her bonnet and veil, "Do not let us speak any more on this subject," pursued she. "It would drive me mad!"

If Mildred had been struck by the aspect of the stranger as she lay senseless in her arms, how much more so was she as she gazed upon her now! There was about her a graceful dignity, a commanding elegance, such as she had never before beheld. Her height, and regal features, would have given her almost too majestic an air, had it not been for the surpassing softness of her large black eyes, *à fleur de tête*. Their angelic expression drew you irresistibly towards her, and in that mild, caressing glance, partaking of the fondly intelligent and trustful look of the greyhound and the deer,

you read a promise of tenderness and truth, and an assurance of honesty that could not deceive. Lady Vernon was absolutely fascinated by her new, and so singularly-formed acquaintance, and could not be prevailed upon to quit her until she had seen her safely to the door of her own abode, and obtained permission to call on her the next day.

The stranger rejoiced in the very plebeian name of Madame Fournier, and inhabited a small cottage *orné*, lost amidst the trees at the very extremity of Lady Vernon's park. One elderly female servant seemed to constitute her whole establishment; and, however all this might be at variance with her aristocratical appearance and elegant attire, Mildred was too completely subjugated (and that for the first time in her life) by her neighbour's winning looks and high-bred manners, to think of anything but of her determination to prosecute the acquaintance.

CHAPTER XI.

AT the end of the month of August, Sir Edward had not returned. He was still at Dieppe, but Lady Vernon was not aware that Madame de Cévèzes was there also ; and that her liaison with the rich young Englishman, was a subject for common scandal. Nor did she know that her husband's sole reason for taking a country-house near Montmorency was, that, between Enghien and St. Leu, Aurélie had a château, where she generally spent some months in the year, surrounded by her fashionable Paris satellites. Mildred lived only in the society of a few intimates, who were too really well-disposed towards her to fill, on such an occasion, the office usually accepted by good-natured friends, and she, therefore, remained in

ignorance of at least some portion of her husband's misdemeanours.

She had contrived to establish a close intimacy with her neighbour, Madame Fournier, and this, one might almost say, whether the latter would or not; for at first she had received Lady Vernon's advances with a degree of cold dignity that would have chilled almost any one; but which, by some inexplicable caprice, only increased Mildred's desire to know more of her. Invitation after invitation to dine, to drive out, to spend the day at the château, did Madame Fournier refuse; at last, she ended by telling Lady Vernon that, during her period of mourning, she had resolved never to leave her own home, or enter any stranger's dwelling, and then, little by little, allowing herself to be touched by her fair neighbour's constant kindness, she let herself be drawn into habits of intimacy, in which she soon, evidently, took an excessive delight. Morning after morning would Mildred spend at the cottage of her interesting friend, and each day she discovered in her some fresh charm, some quality more admirable than the rest; and she went

on, admiring and loving, without, in reality, knowing any more of her friend's true position, than she did the first day she saw her.

On one of her early visits to her neighbour, she had met the Abbé de Nangis, who had accompanied her home, and, on their road, had told her Madame Fournier was a penitent of his, and one of those whom he loved and respected most. "She has lost both husband and children recently," continued he, "and many misfortunes have fallen on her,—it is that which makes her so timid, and induces her to shun society." And, when he had conducted Mildred to her own door, "Lady Vernon," added he, impressively, "pray be kind to her, and force her to accept your kindness. You will not repent of it." And this was one of the reasons for which Mildred had persevered in her attempt to conciliate the recluse.

She had a strong instinctive respect for the Abbé de Nangis, and she felt quite secure that any one in whom he took so lively an interest must be in every point a recommendable person.

Madame Fournier was also but a recent

inhabitant of the valley, and had not become a tenant of the cottage more than ten days or a fortnight before Lady Vernon had arrived at the château.

During two months, however, that had now elapsed since they both fixed themselves in the environs of Montmorency, Madame Fournier had already become celebrated amongst the poor peasantry, into whose miserable abodes she brought hope, comfort, and often restored health. Early and late, at day-break and at night-fall, was this active and courageous creature to be met, either in the lonely paths of the forest, on her road to some poor man's hut, or by the miserable bed-side of some humble patient, for whose benefit she had transformed herself into a lay sister of charity.

The doctor of the village, a certain M. Bertrand, whose talent far exceeded his position, had become one of her great allies; and, whenever a case appeared to him to require either particular attention, or the outlay of more money than his lowly invalid could command, he addressed himself, without scruple, to Madame Fournier. Her reputation filled the canton, and

she never passed along the roads, and through the adjacent villages, without the very children invoking a blessing on her.

The Duc de Montévreux was, if possible, more constant than ever in his visits to Lady Vernon; and she, not any less blind than heretofore, felt his society more and more indispensable to her comfort.

Every time Lady Vernon walked by the gate of the cottage (the lower windows of which were just discernible from the road) with either the Duchess, Madame de Moreton, or Gaston, the *jalousies* were hermetically closed, and a perfect silence reigned about the place. She had vainly tried to inspire Madame Fournier with a desire to be acquainted with the Duchess and Madame de Moreton, but particularly with the latter, by a description of her gentleness and charitable disposition.

If Mildred could have been awakened to a sense of her position, with regard to Gaston de Montévreux, circumstances were not wanting that ought to have opened her eyes. One day, in particular, she was very near obtaining an insight into the dangers which surrounded her,

yet the opportunity went by, and left her no wiser than before. The Duchess and Madame de Moreton had come down to breakfast with Lady Vernon, and were loitering over some embroidery in the boudoir, when they were joined by M. de Montévreux

“And pray, *mon beau cousin*,” said the Viscountess, “where may you have been since the night before last? For, as I think, that was the latest period of your appearance in the centre of our civilization.” (It was a fact, that, on the preceding day, *par extraordinaire*, Gaston, absent from Paris, had not gone to Montmorency.)

“I started yesterday morning for Versailles, where I slept, and whence I am arrived at this moment,” replied he, after the due salutations were exchanged with the mistress of the house.

“From Versailles!” exclaimed the Duchess; “and, if I may ask, what were you doing in that mournful monument of by-gone glories?”

“Why, little enough, to say the truth,” answered the Duke, smiling; “at least nothing that I should not have done better to leave

alone. I was losing 18,000 francs, at the races."

"Well, I hope it amuses you," rejoined his mother. "I have sometimes heard that in gambling of all kinds, the first emotion is that of losing, second to which only, is to be ranked that of gaining. I hope this may be true; for, if you are amused by it, I have nothing to say—only," and she gave him a look full of mixed intelligence and archness, "if you are not so, it is too dear."

Gaston shrugged his shoulders. "Amused!" repeated he, almost disdainfully, "*qu'est-ce qui amuse ?*"

"There they all are!" exclaimed Madame de Montévreux, "all the same! Now you know, dear Lady Vernon, before you, I can't abuse horse-racing and many things which are your national sports; but I can attack the contemptuous way in which the young men of our age treat the things of this fair world. To listen to them, there is nothing worth living for. Look at Gaston, who ought to know better; there he is, turning up his nose at

the bare suspicion of being amusable, and he is not yet eight-and-twenty !”

“ I wonder what Olympe will say to all this,” interposed the Viscountess, “ when you are once married.”

“ Poor Olympe !” added the Duchess, “ a pretty present, indeed, to make to a bride, is that of a husband who professes that nothing on earth is worthy to please him or attract his attention.”

Gaston was on the rack. His colour went and came, and he turned over book after book on the tables and consoles, to hide his vexation.

“ Who is Olympe ? ” asked, somewhat timidly, Lady Vernon.

“ What ! don’t you know ? ” replied the Duchess, “ why, my niece, or rather, my husband’s niece, Mademoiselle de la Roche Bermont ; did you not know that she is to be Gaston’s wife ? ”

“ Not the least in the world,” was the answer.

“ Yes ! ” continued Madame de Moreton,

playfully, "my gay cousin, such as you behold him, *le beau et brillant* Gaston, will, this time next year, be a married man. It is this time next year, is it not?" said she, appealing to the Duke.

"I really do not precisely know—I cannot inform you on the subject; it will be as it pleases Heaven," replied M. de Montévieux, who did not know what to say. The answer which would have been the natural one for a Frenchman, he felt he could not make; he dared not, before Mildred, appear to regard matrimony as a chain, or to look forward to the period of his marriage with disgust. He was therefore obliged to reply evasively, and with great reserve.

"As it pleases Heaven!" echoed Madame de Montévieux, "I hope so, in truth; but methinks you show small desire to hasten the event; and yet, let me tell you," and she turned to Mildred, "that Olympe is remarkably beautiful, and will be seventeen when she leaves the *Sacré Cœur* next spring."

Shortly after this, the Duchess rose to depart, accompanied by Clémentine, and carrying with

her the reluctant and annoyed Gaston ; the more annoyed, because he could not venture to betray the vexation, which, pent up within him, had grown into positive anger.

Had Mildred been less utterly inexperienced than she was, she would have understood her state of mind when she found herself alone. But, as it was, the kind of vague disquietude to which she became a prey, taught her nothing, nor did she even associate with it in any way the idea of Gaston's marriage. She was not surprised at the constant recurrence of her thoughts to that one subject ; nor did she avow to herself that she was unusually uneasy and unable to support solitude. She took a bonnet and parasol, and, without any work in her hand, strolled forth, in the burning heat, to her neighbour's cottage ; and Lady Vernon did not remark that it was the first time she had sought Madame Fournier, not for the pleasure of enjoying her society, but because she could not bear to be alone.

Arrived at her friend's, Lady Vernon found there the Abbé de Nangis. A feeling, of which she was unconscious, and to which she

yielded, drove her, imperiously, to speak of the Duc de Montévieux ; while Madame Fournier, absorbed by the manufacture of some clothes she was making for poor children, appeared not to listen to their discourse. Mildred learned from the Abbé, every particular of Gaston's engagement to his cousin, and derived therefrom a stronger degree of instinctive (and still unconscious) dislike, towards the Princesse de la Roche Bermont, than that with which she had been already disposed to gratify that lady.

"Madame de Moreton, then, accompanied the Duchess in her visit to you this morning?" remarked the *Curé*.

"What a very amiable person she must be," observed Madame Fournier, upon Lady Vernon's affirmative answer ; "and, from all I have heard, I fear she suffers considerably."

"She is always cheerful," rejoined Mildred, "and yet I know that she harbours in her heart a degree of affection for her husband, that is, to me, quite inexplicable after his infamous conduct."

"Monsieur de Moreton has much to answer

for," said Madame Fournier, gravely. "In married life each party is responsible for the happiness of the other, and nothing can excuse either for the betrayal of so sacred a trust."

"And yet," interrupted M. de Nangis, "I am certain that the Vicomtesse is only waiting for an opportunity of exercising her indulgence; and that, whenever her erring husband returns to her, (of which I confess I almost despair, though she literally derives her existence from this hope) she will as completely forget his past conduct, as though it had never been."

"That only proves her goodness and amiability," rejoined Madame Fournier; "but it does not in any degree, however slight, excuse M. de Moreton's faults."

"Well, at last!" cried Lady Vernon, "I have found in France some one who is of my opinion on these matters. I have always reproached Madame de Moreton with her too great indulgence of character; but I am sure you will agree with me, that if that indulgence may be permitted when shown towards her own husband, it is perfectly inexcusable—it is culpable,

when extended towards a woman whose conduct has sunk her below the level of society, and whose guilt has rendered her a subject for public scandal."

"They must be very confident in their own strength," interposed M. de Nangis solemnly, "who venture thus to condemn others."

"Oh! you know, Monsieur le Curé," replied Mildred, "that on this point I do not agree much better with you than with the Viscountess, but I am convinced Madame Fournier will agree with me. What do you think," pursued she, turning to the latter, "of Madame de Moreton's defending, on all occasions, and preaching indulgence, as a duty, towards such creatures as that dreadful Madame de Boislambert?"

"I cannot judge," answered Madame Fournier. "What has Madame de Boislambert done?"

"What! have you not heard of that?" exclaimed Lady Vernon. "Why, I thought the very loungers in the streets and the labour-

ers in the fields had heard of her history. She ran away from her husband, and had the effrontery to fly to the abode of her lover, who entertained, himself, such an opinion of her, that he would not even become the partner of her flight."

"Permit me," said the Abbé. "This has been so strenuously denied by M. Chavigny himself, and by all his friends, that no one has now the right to assume or propagate such a report as true."

"Well, never mind that," resumed Mildred ; "you will not deny, I suppose, that Madame de Boislambert has run away? And if you knew," and she again addressed Madame Fournier, who was by this time more intent than ever upon her work, "if you knew what a husband she has deserted!"

Madame Fournier raised her head, and with unusual solemnity. "Her punishment will not fail," said she to Mildred. "She will be humbled and punished in this world, before even meeting the dread punishments that await her hereafter."

“And her sufferings in this world will be sufficient to expiate her sins,” added M. de Nangis.

“Do not say that, Monsieur l’Abbé,” answered she; “nothing can ever be sufficient to efface such a deadly sin as hers.”

“There!” said Mildred, “that is, indeed, a proper and a moral sentiment. Such creatures ought to be put forth on the world, and branded like Cain, for the satisfaction of the virtuous.”

“The virtuous!” exclaimed the Abbé, in a tone of almost terrible severity. “The virtuous, Lady Vernon!—*they* never condemn. Did you ever read the Gospel?” And, on Mildred’s sign of assent: “Then, allow me to say, it has been with small profit; for you have forgotten one of the most beautiful passages it contains. Our Divine Master contented himself with saying to the woman taken in adultery, ‘Go thou, and sin no more—I cannot condemn thee.’ But what were his words to those around?—‘He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.’ This was the judgment of the Saviour of all man-

kind. And you, Lady Vernon," continued he, fixing on her his eagle eye, with a searching, reproving glance, before which the stoutest might have quailed; "are you so immaculate, are you so devoid of all sin, as to dare to cast the first stone? Examine yourself—dare you do that?"

"Certainly I dare do so," replied Mildred, proudly.

M. de Nangis looked at her with an expression that, from indignation, changed into compassion. "I am sorry to hear it," replied he, impressively, "and I pity you profoundly."

"Why, if I did not dare do that," continued Mildred, "what should I be myself?"

"Perhaps, a better woman," answered the Abbé, emphatically.

"Better!" cried Mildred. "In truth, Monsieur le Curé, we do not understand one another."

"We do not, indeed," replied he; "for you utterly misunderstand the spirit of the Divine Word which it is my office to teach."

"But," pursued Lady Vernon, "I do not even see that there is any merit in avoiding the

peculiar sin to which we have alluded. Do you?" and she turned to Madame Fournier. "That sort of virtue appears to me so very easy!"

"No!" answered her friend, "I cannot venture to say that. "I dare not call any virtue easy."

"And to those who do," added M. de Nangis, "one can only say, take care, for they are in the greatest danger."

Mildred smiled more ironically than was consistent with good taste, as she said:

"I confess I am but little alarmed at the perils which surround me." And, as M. de Nangis rose to take his leave, "We part *sans rancune*, I hope, M. l'Abbé," said she, "although I do not yet believe in the dangers which surround me."

"My mission is never to recollect the harm people say of themselves," replied the Abbé, mildly, "and to pray that Heaven, in its mercy, may avert from them the evils they call down on their own heads."

"Pray for me, my father," rejoined Madame Fournier, humbly and earnestly, "for my sins

and my troubles demand the intervention of your prayers."

"My child," answered the *Curé*, with deep feeling, "the expiation has been so heavy that the sin must be effaced ; and, for your troubles, Heaven will give you courage, and, who knows ? —consolation."

"Courage," said she, despondingly ; "perhaps ; consolation—never !"

Mildred was so habituated to regard Madame Fournier as a species of Trappistine in regard to rigorism, that she was never astonished to hear her talk of her sins, but merely wondered what the sins of such an angel could ever have been.

Lady Vernon returned home, dined, drove out through the woods, and thought the country less beautiful, and even the sunset less gorgeous than usual. She supposed she was tired of living alone at Montmorency ; wondered when it would "please Sir Edward to rejoin her, and whither they should go next ; and yet, the thought of leaving Paris and its environs brought her no comfort, but the contrary.

Evening had become night, and Mildred was

sitting in the large drawing-room, turning over, by the light of the lamp, the leaves of a book full of views, just come out, of Naples and Sicily. One after another they passed beneath her fingers, arresting only her eye, until at last she closed the volume impatiently, and moved towards the piano. It was open; and, seating herself before it, she struck a few unconnected chords. Following gradually the caprices of her memory, Mildred sang, in a low voice, snatches of different compositions, and at last ended by singing, from beginning to end, with more sentiment than she usually evinced, Schubert's exquisite and melancholy ballad "L'Adieu."

She had scarcely finished it, when a voice from behind her exclaimed: "*Dieu, que c'est beau! et quelle voix!*" These words were uttered almost as though the speaker were talking to himself, and not intending them to be overheard. Mildred started, sprung from her seat, and, going straight to the spot whence the voice proceeded, stood face to face, at the open window, with M. le Duc de Montévieux. Gaston was leaning against the window-frame, in the

attitude of an enraptured listener—but what brought him there at that hour? He felt that Mildred was annoyed at the morning's conversation—(these things, alas ! are so quickly felt.) He was enchanted, at the same time, that she was grieved ; enchanted that Mildred, however unconsciously (and he perfectly well knew that it *was* so) should be annoyed at the announcement of his engagement to his cousin, and grieved that she should suffer a single moment's pain, even when that pain gave him pleasure.

He had put up his horse at the village inn, and, walking round the premises, had penetrated, by one of the little park gates, into the garden, and was preparing to arrive at the house from the back entrance, when his steps were arrested on the lawn by the sound of Mildred's voice.

When Lady Vernon perceived the Duke, her agitation, though slight, was distinctly visible. The moon-light shone full upon her as she came to where Gaston stood, and she could not hide from him that she grew pale, and then blushed, and that her heart fluttered. But then, she

thought she was frightened at having been caught in the act of singing ; and perhaps she was. M. de Montévreux thought her lovelier than anything he had ever seen, and dared not look in her eyes for fear she should see in his the too clear expression of his admiration and his love.

They walked out in the still moonlight, together ; and in the darker paths of the little wood Mildred accepted Gaston's arm, and even drew closer to him—(for she was very timid and had a great fear of robbers) than she would have done if she could have guessed what he felt. Still she never asked him why he was there ; but Gaston, who was a man of the world, and feared lest, after he was gone, she might recollect his omission, carelessly recounted to her a pretended loss ; and they made, upon their return to the house, a minute search for a missing *portefeuille*, which the Duke supposed he might have left in the morning at the château.

After M. de Montévreux had, at Mildred's invitation, drank tea with her, he petitioned to be allowed to hear her sing again. And Mildred had no objection, for she was (still uncon-

sciously) more delighted than she could comprehend at M. de Montévreux's admiration; yet, when she did again seat herself at the piano, her voice, during the first ten minutes, trembled in a manner that annoyed her immeasurably, and to Gaston seemed divine.

Between music and conversation, hour after hour fled by, and half-past twelve o'clock struck before M. de Montévreux prepared to depart. When he did so, at length, it was only in obedience to the dictates of his prudence, for he would have stayed where he was for ever. His horse had been, by Lady Vernon's orders, sent for from the village; and when he mounted it to return, he, for the first time, took leave of Mildred without offering her his hand. He hurried down the steps of the *perron*, on which Lady Vernon stood, admiring the beauty of his steed; and, once in the saddle, with a rapid adieu, dashed through the gates and up the stony road.

Mildred did not move. She was looking at one little white cloud that was at this moment drifting across the face of the moon; and the gallop of Gaston's horse had died away in the distance before she retired from the door.

Mildred was so happy! She thought the country so lovely, the moon so remarkably bright! M. de Montévreux's visit had decidedly done her good. She was too lonely in her great château, and evidently wanted amusement.

Ennui ! Distraction !—Nine out of ten begin thus !

CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT a week after the Duke's nocturnal visit, Mildred, who had for some days suffered from a cold, came in from her drive, complaining of a sensation of unusual chilliness. In her hurry to reach home she had got down at one of the park gates, and crossed the lawn on foot, regardless of the violent rain that had fallen some hours before. The grass was very wet, and the damp had penetrated to her feet. She thought no more of so slight a mishap, and retired to rest at her habitual hour, sensible only of a rather dull pain in her head.

About one o'clock in the morning, Lady Vernon's maid, who inhabited a little cabinet adjoining Mildred's apartment, was aroused by something like a groan proceeding from her

mistress's room. She hastened to Mildred's bed-side, and found her in a really alarming state. Her whole face was crimson with the flush of fever ; her pulse, hard and full, beat so rapidly that it could scarcely be counted ; and she complained of an oppression that prevented her from drawing her breath, and seemed to threaten suffocation. The frightened abigail called up the other servants, and, at the same time that it was decided to send for Dr. Bertrand, it was judged right instantaneously to apprise Madame Fournier as the only female friend of Lady Vernon's who was on, or near, the spot.

The night was dark, and the rain, swept by the wind, fell in torrents ; but wind, rain, nor darkness stayed Madame Fournier's progress ; and, drenched to the skin, she entered the invalid's room, and prepared to stay there and devote to her all her time and care.

When Mildred perceived the figure of her friend, a look of pleasure lighted up her face, in spite of her suffering. " So you have come at last," said she, in a faint, thick voice, extending her hot hand.

"Now that you really want me, yes!" was the reply,—acknowledged in turn by a renewed pressure of the hand.

When Dr. Bertrand arrived, he gave his opinion almost directly,—not to the patient, or her maid,—but to Madame Fournier, declaring the malady to be an attack of measles, rendered very serious by having been checked by cold while yet in an incipient state, and adding, "I know it is of no use in me to represent to you the exceeding danger to yourself of your attendance on this lady. I can only hope and pray that you may escape unscathed."

At daybreak, a man was despatched to Paris, to Madame de Montévieux and Madame de Moreton, to entreat them to use every influence to induce some one of the Parisian medical illustrations to accompany them, as early as possible, to Montmorency. Before noon, all the party had arrived, and the two greatest professors of the healing art in France entirely concurred in all Dr. Bertrand's opinions; expressing, in the most flattering terms, their complete approval of his projected mode of treatment. As it was useless for either of

Mildred's friends to attempt gaining admittance to her apartment, they returned to Paris, accompanied by Gaston. But the latter stayed with them only till they arrived at the Hôtel Montévieux, and then he forthwith, and in secret, returned to Montmorency.

The malady proceeded with increased violence, and became more dangerous than even Dr. Bertrand had at first apprehended. Brain fever ensued, and for four days and nights Mildred passed from a kind of wandering, trance-like stupefaction to the absolute ravings of delirium. Never, for one hour, did Madame Fournier leave her friend. Never, during the fortnight that Mildred lay in danger of death, did she once close her eyes or rest her limbs on a couch.

At the end of a fortnight, Mildred, thanks to her youth and constitution, was out of danger, but still requiring the most minute and constant care. Madame de Montévieux and the Viscountess were now allowed to visit her, and they could not repress an involuntary feeling of curiosity at the idea of at last beholding the mysterious friend, of whose devotion they had,

at each of their daily calls, received the most exalted picture from the servants. But they were fated to be disappointed. Madame Fournier had again fled at their approach, and they found Lady Vernon alone.

How Gaston envied them the privilege of their sex, as he saw them mounting the stairs, at whose foot he was condemned to stay ! His sufferings had been most acute during Lady Vernon's illness, and the traces of them were amply visible upon his countenance. Not alone were his days spent in the environs of the château, but at night, when the Duchess thought him either asleep, or spending his hours at some place of amusement, he was wandering, like a troubled spirit, about the precincts of Mildred's abode.

One or two desperate attempts he did make to see Madame Fournier, but with the same success that attended the efforts of his mother and cousin ; he even addressed to her a note, which was answered verbally ; and, whilst his whole heart was filled with thankfulness to the being who thus watched over the woman he loved, it was denied him to express to her,

personally, even the merest word of common gratitude. More than once, however, as Madame Fournier, in the dead of night, approached the window of her patient's room, did she perceive a shadow upon the lawn, which shadow she knew and felt was no other than Gaston's.

One morning, before Lady Vernon was yet able to leave her bed, she missed Madame Fournier; and, on enquiring for her, was told that she had been suddenly called away the night before, while her patient was sleeping, to meet some relations who were passing through Paris, and who had sent an express to require her immediate attendance on them. When Dr. Bertrand came, Mildred's first word was of Madame Fournier, and she received from him intelligence similar to that which she had already received from her maid.

Her gratitude to that lady was inexhaustible; it overflowed in her every look and word. She could talk of nothing else to the Viscountess and to Madame de Montévieux.

But the truth, well concealed at first, could not always be hidden from Mildred; and she had

scarcely been able to descend to the *salon*, and take the air on a couch placed for her on the lawn, before she discovered that Madame Fournier herself was but just rescued from the jaws of death. She had caught the disease whilst attending on Lady Vernon, and her illness had been even more alarming than her friend's, from the circumstance of the malady having fallen on a more nervous subject, and on a frame exhausted by upwards of fifteen sleepless nights.

When Mildred first heard this, she prepared to go instantaneously and visit her too devoted friend, but she was prevented by the positive and rigorous orders of the doctor, who treated as madness the bare notion that she could yet be conveyed so far as the cottage gate. The consequence of this opposition was a violent *attaque de nerfs*, and a fainting fit; but Mildred, like children and invalids, had now resolved to arrive at her ends by cunning, since it was forbidden her to do so by force. Accordingly, on the day following, as soon as Dr. Bertrand had paid his visit, she desired that the moment M. de Montévieux arrived (his coming was a matter of course), he might be shown into the

boudoir to her, and any other visitors who might happen to come at the same moment, into the drawing-room.

On his arrival, she lost no time in requesting him to take her to Madame Fournier's in defiance of doctor, friends, and domestics. The Duke hesitated—but Mildred's entreaties were so vehement: "I counted upon *you*," said she reproachfully, "and you will do no more for me than the rest:" and, as she uttered these words, her eyes overflowed with tears.

This M. de Montévieux could not bear. shawls, bonnets, and parasols were at hand; Gaston procured the garden chair, and, taking their way by the lime avenue, which hid them from all eyes, they escaped, to Lady Vernon's infinite joy. When they reached the cottage, the same elderly female whom Mildred had so often seen, opened the door; but neither prayers nor entreaties could induce her to admit Lady Vernon inside the house.

As they were returning home, they were met, in the middle of the lime avenue, by Mildred's maid, who came running towards them, ex-

claiming, at the top of her voice : " My lady ! my lady ! Sir Edward is just arrived ! "

M. de Montévreux turned literally scarlet, and bit his lip involuntarily. Mildred felt ready to faint. She was not quite satisfied with herself at feeling so excessively displeased at her husband's arrival. But then, she argued that he could not have come on her account, or he would have come sooner ; as he was quite aware, from the first, of her illness, and she supposed her peculiar displeasure at his coming held entirely to what she termed her just resentment at his conduct. Gaston, on the contrary, chose to think Sir Edward *had* come to take care of his wife, and was particularly incensed at his showing her any mark of kindness ; he would rather he had shown, evidently, that he did not care whether she lived or died.

When Mildred was once more re-established on her *chaise longue* in the boudoir, she enquired (because she thought it her duty to do so) for Sir Edward. The answer was, that he was dressing after his journey. M. de Mon-

tévreux rose, somewhat abruptly, and, pretexting business, took leave of Lady Vernon without waiting to see her husband, to whom he requested his compliments might be presented.

CHAPTER XIII.

It will easily be believed that the double illness of Lady Vernon and Madame Fournier, had considerably increased the attachment which already bound them together. As soon as her neighbour would consent to receive her, Mildred spent a great portion of her time at the cottage, rendering to Madame Fournier, in spite of her resistance, a thousand of those little delicate services of which she had scarcely ceased to stand in need herself. The rest of the day, or nearly so, was devoted to M. de Montévreux.

As to Sir Edward, his presence at the château brought little or no change to Mildred's habitual way of living. He remained but rarely

at home, stayed whole days and even nights absent, and, six days out of the week, did not appear at dinner. This sort of conduct secretly enchanted Gaston, who was now thoroughly convinced that Sir Edward's return had no connection with his wife's illness, and that he had simply established himself in his château, because Aurélie had, at the same period, returned to hers. Still, the fact of Sir Edward Vernon having his nominal abode under the same roof with Mildred, lent a certain sanction to M. de Montévieux's frequent visits, and enabled him to be far more constantly than heretofore in the society of Lady Vernon.

Innocently imprudent, Mildred went on, defying fate, and laying the foundation of her own misery, if not of her own ruin. Her feelings with respect to Sir Edward were now perfectly defined to herself. She despised more than she disliked him, and the only disguise she consented to impose on her contempt was one of inflexible stiffness and reserve.

Lady Vernon and the Duke were just in that peculiarly delicate position of sentiment one with

the other, to which the most trifling occurrence may be sufficient to put an end. Their situation resembled those unstable tenements built in certain rocky places—you may live in them for years, so long as all continues tranquil, and as the one vibration remains silent that is destined to shake your shelter to its base; but that chord in Nature's harmony once touched, and your frail abode is shattered—a word jarring on that mighty granite nerve, will suffice to bring the whole edifice to the ground.

The idea of vengeance never entered into Mildred's brain. Setting aside any notion of guilt, she never even adverted to the possible expediency of making her husband jealous without cost of her honour. On the one hand, she did not deem him worth the trouble, and on the other, it seemed to her a mode of retaliation in which her own dignity was likely to be the greatest sufferer.

Sir Edward, when at his home, showed no displeasure whatever at M. de Montévieux's almost constant presence there. On the contrary, he probably hailed it as the means through which he was enabled to enjoy com-

parative peace. The two men were together upon "very good terms" as the world styles it, and Gaston repaid with detestation, cloaked by civility, the politeness of Sir Edward, which only marked indifference.

The earlier part of the day was usually passed by Lady Vernon at Madame Fournier's, and Gaston, arriving generally for lunch at three o'clock, remained, nine times out of ten, to dinner, either *en tête-à-tête*, or with the Duchess, Madame de Moreton, and a few other chosen friends. Rarely, under any circumstances now, was Mildred's evening drive undertaken without the Duke's occupying the seat opposite to her in the calèche, and midnight was often past before he left the château. How many long rambles were taken through the woods! How many hours were passed together in silence! For words seemed to have lost their utility, or only to embarrass; and it was a curious fact, which, however, passed unheeded by Lady Vernon, that, when she found herself alone with Gaston, by far the greater portion of their time was spent without either of them unclosing their lips.

One day, they had walked to the two old towers that still remain of the edifice known in feudal times as the Castle of St. Leu. The walk had rather fatigued Lady Vernon, and, on the road home, they had seated themselves on a little knoll in the forest, shaded, on one side, by large overhanging trees, and on the other, commanding, through the opening of an alley, a beautiful view of Paris in the distance. As usual, they sat for some time without speaking. The heat of the day, and the drowsy hum of the insects, lulled them into a dangerously-delicious dreaminess, that bound them, as in magnetic chains, and from which neither made any effort to escape. The earth was so fair around them, the sky so serene above, on every passing wind there came such fragrant whispers, on every leaf and flower there shone such radiant beauty, that in the midst of this wondrous hymn to the Fountain of Universal Love, it was scarcely possible for the hearts of the two human habitants of the desert alone to be unmoved and mute. At length, the position grew to be insupportable, and even Mildred felt that to say anything would be preferable to this silence.

She was seated at the foot of a small oak tree, and leaned against its stem. Her bonnet lay on the grass beside her, and to screen her from the chance rays of the sun, she held over her head a grey parasol lined with a deep rose colour, the reflection of which gave to her face a peculiarly warm and beautiful tint. M. de Montévreux sat at a few paces distant, and rather below her. A handsomer couple could scarcely be portrayed by poet's rhyme or painter's pencil. Mildred, with a languid motion of her hand, put back from her forehead the mass of curls that clustered there, and seemed to oppress her by their weight. Her eyes encountered those of Gaston, and the look she gave him said plainly and imploringly "*speak !*"

M. de Montévreux obeyed. "I was just thinking," remarked he, in a tone that clearly showed he was thinking of something totally different, "how extraordinary are the weaknesses of the great men of this earth. Who could imagine that Louis XIV, in his youth, in the pride of his glory and power, should have preferred laying out millions upon the creation of an artificial wonder, on the flat, barren soil

of Versailles, to profiting by the natural advantages of the Côte de Champigny, merely because, from the latter, he discerned the spire of St. Denis !”

“To say the truth,” said Lady Vernon, “I can better comprehend this aversion in the midst of the glories you mention, than I could when those glories were on the wane. I can conceive that there might be a time when the *Grand Roi* would not have cared that anything should remind him of his mortality. In his case, I can understand what, in the case of any ordinary individual, I should be at a loss to comprehend. I should like to know,” continued Mildred, in a half bitter, half desponding tone, “what matter it would be to me if I saw every day, from my sitting-room window, the gates of the churchyard where I am to be buried—I care not how soon !”

“*You*, Lady Vernon !” exclaimed Gaston.

“Why, what have I to regret ?” pursued she.

This was not very complimentary.

“I can easily conceive,” resumed the Duke, “that *you* would leave behind little worth your

regretting ; but have you no consideration for those who would regret you ?”

“ And who is there would regret me ?” asked Mildred, sadly, but frankly.

Here would have been an opportunity, with any other woman than Lady Vernon ; but the Duke was taken aback. He saw that Mildred did *not* expect the answer he was on the point of making, and therefore he wisely kept it to himself ; and, with some internal vexation :

“ Many more than you think for, perhaps,” he contented himself with replying. “ My mother, my cousin Clémentine, your friend Madame Fournier, and, in your own country, without a doubt, countless numbers.”

Lovers, when not permitted to be tender, are the rudest beings in creation. Gaston would have included the whole world in his list before he would have added his own name to it. Lady Vernon probably, did not notice his incivility. She shook her head, and smiled with polite distrust. M. de Montévieux changed the conversation.

“ So you think, then,” said he, “ that Louis XIV. must have found enough in life to make

him desirous of forgetting that it must one day end?"

"If such vain presumption could ever be excusable in mortal man," answered she, "I do certainly think it might be more so in his case than in most others."

"It has always been a question in my mind," resumed the Duke, "whether Louis XIV., during his whole life of grandeur and glory, ever tasted one single instant of real enjoyment, or whether he was not, from the first hour to the last, the most miserable man in his dominions—morally speaking, a very Wandering Jew."

"He was the cause of so much unhappiness to others," rejoined Mildred, "that any misery he might suffer was but justice."

"In my supposition," continued Gaston, "the unhappiness he inflicted upon others, was but a species of vengeance, a proof of the envy excited in him by the aspect of what, spite of all his greatness, was denied him."

"But his behaviour to his wife?" objected Mildred.

"*Ma foi!*" replied the Duke, "I was not exactly thinking of her; but I suppose that,

notwithstanding the respect and veneration lavished upon her, her existence was tolerably wretched under the reigns of Madame la Marquise de Montespan, and the widow Scarron. But then, to be sure, that was her own fault."

"How so?" asked Mildred, ingenuously.

We have said that Gaston had been considerably annoyed by an expression of Lady Vernon's. He had been induced to doubt whether, after all, he had made any progress in her affections, and whether he was not about as far advanced at the present hour, as at the first moment he met her. Under the influence of this *pique*, M. de Montévreux was savagely desirous of rendering to Mildred some portion of the pain she had caused him, and he accordingly adopted a tone of thought he knew she particularly abhorred, and became thoroughly *French* in all the ideas he emitted. To Lady Vernon's question he replied by an ironical laugh.

"Why," said he, "the remedy was so easy for all this unhappiness. If his Majesty, King Phebus, threw his god-like glances upon too many La Vallières and Fontanges, surely there

were enough *Grands Seigneurs* at his court, who would have been proud to play a similar part about Marie-Thérèse of Spain, and console her for the humiliation of the royal neglect. Her aunt, Anne of Austria, was wiser than she, and Buckingham—”

“Oh! for shame!” interrupted Mildred. “Marie-Thérèse, at least, was above all suspicion.”

“Yes,” rejoined he, “I know Bossuet has said so, and has written that her greatest joy, and the greatest proof of her merit was, that, whilst she was agreeable to Heaven, she was so also to the sublimest monarch upon earth, (which only proves that the ‘Eagle of Meaux’ carried his courtiership to impiety, but does not convince me.) I cannot believe any woman in her position would be so mad as not to profit by the consolation that—”

Mildred interrupted him, “But surely, M. le Duc,” exclaimed she vehemently, “you do not think, that every married woman whose husband ill-treats and abandons her, is to become, for that reason, a reproach to her whole sex?” And Lady Vernon branched off into a tirade that plainly showed she was intent upon her

own grievances, whilst speaking of those of Louis the Fourteenth's Queen.

The Duke, after drawing the picture of a young wife deserted by her husband, proceeded to paint, with the warmest colours of his fancy and his heart, the happiness she might taste in a *liaison* with a being who loved her "disinterestedly and for herself," (as if such a love existed!) "Left by that one, who, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, is bound only by the law to cherish her," continued Gaston, "she would find in him whose heart had chosen her for his own—"

"Stop, M. le Duc," cried Lady Vernon, with an unusually harsh and decisive tone; "she would sacrifice all to recognise, in a short time, that the being for whom she did so, far from believing in the truth of the sacrifice, spoke of her affection as of a thing to be *necessarily* given to another if not to him. *Moi ou un autre!*—there is your creed, but it is a creed as false as it is infamous!" And in uttering these last words, Mildred's eyes darted fire, and her cheeks burnt with the flame of genuine indig-

nation. Gaston gazed upon her, surprised, but not offended. Whence came this change, Lady Vernon? Why did M. de Moreton's words, which had lain *perdus* in your memory till now, flash for the *first* time across your brain? And why did you, for the *first* time too, direct your ire *not* against the existence of the sin itself, but against the base and ignorant ingratitude with which it might chance to be repaid?

As M. de Montévieux rose to accompany Lady Vernon home, he felt that he *was* farther advanced than when he first met her.

On their way to the château, they spoke not one syllable. The Duke walked close to Lady Vernon, but without offering her his arm. As they entered a narrow lane about a quarter of a mile from the park, they heard behind them the tramp of horses. This lane was one of the most disagreeable portions of the whole forest. From being arched over by the branches that met overhead, and formed a perfect vault, it was constantly damp when every other path was parched, and one night's rain filled its deep ruts with water that remained there until it turned into mud, which mud never dried. It formed,

however, the shortest road home, and for that reason Lady Vernon had chosen it.

When they arrived near the middle, a lady and gentleman, trotting their horses furiously, and talking and laughing loudly, were close upon them. Mildred drew up to the extreme edge of the path; but almost before she could recognise, in the equestrians who dashed by her, Madame de Cévèzes and Sir Edward Vernon, she felt the consequences of their speed. Her white dress was covered with mud, a particle of which had flown upon her cheek. The spot was soon wiped out; but the insult remained, and Mildred grew pale at the thought. M. de Montévieux, on the contrary, who had instantly flown to her side, was flushed and quivering with rage. He grasped her unresisting arm, and drew it within his own. Their eyes met.

"Have you forgiven me?" asked Gaston in a low tone, and hurriedly seizing her hand.

"And you?" rejoined Mildred, not knowing what she said. He pressed her hand passionately to his lips. Mildred burst into tears,

and, leaning upon M. de Montévieux for support, much credit was due to the latter, that, instead of taking any undue advantage of his position, he contented himself with comforting her as a tender brother would comfort a favourite sister.

But for what did Gaston beseech Lady Vernon's pardon? And for what did she conceive she stood in need of his? These are some few of the mysteries that, with people who have no habit of self-examination, often lead to so many dangerous errors, and to such irretrievable folly.

CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER the occurrence I have related, Lady Vernon virtually separated herself entirely from her husband. She never again addressed a word to him if she happened to meet him by chance; and uniformly left any apartment he might enter, the instant he appeared. To say the truth, Sir Edward had felt considerably ashamed of his involuntary rudeness to Mildred. He had not recognised her till the harm was done, although as much cannot be said for Aurélie. The latter had not only committed, and forced her companion to commit, with premeditation, the insult we have mentioned;

but, when she perceived the regret with which the act inspired Sir Edward, she tried to defend herself by calumniating Mildred, and throwing ridicule upon her husband.

“*Laissez donc,*” said she maliciously. “They perceived you much less than you perceived them ; and *you* were far from being the person by whom they would have best liked to be surprised.”

But, notwithstanding the influence Aurélie exercised over him, Sir Edward could not be induced to credit anything derogatory to Mildred’s reputation. He *knew* his wife too well, not to be thoroughly aware that any attempt upon his part to *appear* even as though he believed in such a monstrous invention, would cover him, in the eyes of Lady Vernon’s friends and his own, not only with ridicule, but with infamy. He did, however, upon this occasion reflect that M. de Montévieux’s visits were certainly rather frequent, and that some colour might perhaps be given to scandal by that circumstance ; but his previsions went no further.

On his return from Dieppe, Sir Edward had acquainted Mildred with his plans for the ensuing winter. He had let his family place in Buckinghamshire, and had already engaged a furnished house in the Champs Elysées, for six months from the following October term. At the time he informed her of these arrangements, he graciously added :

“If you dislike being so long absent from England, you can, if you choose, go down to Westmoreland and stay with your aunt Egerton, at the Larches, for, as to having two separate establishments, or a house in London, it is impossible ; we have no means for such ruinous expenses.”

One thing rather astonished Mildred in this speech ; it was the qualification of any expense as “ruinous ;” for she had hitherto seen Sir Edward foremost in all questions of lavish expenditure ; and she was also not a little surprised to find that there was a limit to the resources of his fortune. Mildred knew so little of the practical portion of affairs : she was so poor a woman of business, that she had believed her

husband's income to be capable of resisting every inroad on it, and was utterly ignorant of the late extravagant demands upon his purse, which had forced him to go over to England.

She knew nothing of the thousands engulfed by the treacherous *tapis vert* of the lansquenet table, or of those, still more madly swallowed up, in the satisfaction of the countless caprices of a *lionne*. Because the Baroness was herself rich, that was no reason for excusing her adorers from being so. A genuine *femme du monde* in Paris, often absorbs more surely the substance of her lover, than those mercenary beauties whose charms belong ostensibly to the highest bidder. Between a *femme du monde* and a *femme entretenue*, there is exactly the same difference that exists between a man for whose services you have agreed to pay so much, and one who leaves his reward "to your generosity."

"*Dans ces sortes de choses le prix fixé est ce qui vaut le mieux et coûte le moins,*" used to say the late Prince T—.

“ But women of the world have no price,” argued one day, in our hearing, a youth from the Provinces, who had taken upon himself their defence.

“ And for that reason, I have always found them much too dear for me !” replied a witty personage we will not name.

Of these rapacious propensities, Sir Edward had no notion when he attached himself to Aurélie’s triumphal car ; nor, if he had, would that have deterred him from it in the slightest degree. He was foolishly, enthusiastically, in love, as our dear countrymen sometimes will be ; and if he had been told that the object of this passion would swallow up his whole fortune in mere absurdities, productive to himself of neither honour nor credit, that would assuredly have been of no avail.

When Mildred heard her husband’s proposition of allowing her to visit her relations in the north of England, she, for an instant, discussed it in her own mind, but quickly decided in the negative, and resigned herself to the furnished house in the Champs Elysées, and to another

winter in Paris. Lady Vernon thought herself influenced by an austere sense of duty, and by the double desire to conceal from the world her domestic dissensions, and at the same time to spare her husband, unworthy as he was, any unnecessary expense. Thus, while she was unconsciously making the first concession to an unacknowledged, illicit affection, Mildred was rising in her own estimation to the majestic height of a Roman matron.

Nevertheless, since the day of the adventure in the lane, Lady Vernon had felt a strange species of agitation in the presence of M. de Montévieux. She instinctively avoided being alone with him; or, when she was so, she contrived that some active employment should distract the attention of each from the other. Music (a sorry expedient, generally, in such cases,) reading aloud, and billiards, were a few of the remedies to which she resorted, to guard against *la solitude à deux*; and, when the efficacy of these was a little blunted, she forced Gaston to teach her to play chess.

In ordinary cases, few things are more dangerous than these lessons, given and received ; and the Duke, who well knew *that*, was highly elate at the thoughts of his delightful professorship. But Mildred evidently wished to learn the game, and put her whole intelligence so ardently into the comprehension of its intricacies, that her master became inwardly furious, and for very vexation let her win battle after battle ; whereat she seemed enraptured ; whilst he, every now and then, would sweep the chess-men sulkily off the board, and beg to be dispensed from playing any more. Mildred thought this betrayed an indifferent temper, but she did not say so.

The end of September was now approaching, and the autumn had just begun to put on its rich mantle of russet gold. One morning, immediately after breakfast, as Lady Vernon was arranging some dahlias in a newly-invented flower-basket, she was agreeably surprised by the appearance of Gaston and his mother, who, for the last two or three days, had not visited the Valley.

Sir Edward had been absent since the previous morning, and his absence was probably destined to last somewhat longer still, for, just before night-fall on the preceding day, his valet had been sent for to the château, and had gone off, laden with divers boxes and dressing-cases, to rejoin his master.

“And the Vicomtesse?” asked Lady Vernon, as soon as they were seated; “has she then quite forgotten me?”

“Poor Clémentine!” replied Madame de Montévieux; “she is, at this moment, too much enslaved by one ruling idea, to think of you, or me, or any other living being—save one. The Viscount arrived from the Levant three days ago.”

As Mildred looked at Gaston and the Duchess, she thought she had never seen so interesting a mother and son. The Duchess, in her youth a celebrated beauty, might well, had she chosen, have retained her rank even now. Few women had a more noble presence or a more graceful air; and when, with her magnificent fair hair arranged in a thousand

feathery curls, her unfaded complexion, her magnificent bust and Juno-like arms, Madame de Montévieux entered a *salon*, few of those around remembered aught but the fact, that the number was infinitely small of more youthful beauties who could stand the competition with the Duchesse de Montévieux.

Her guests did not stay over long with Mildred, for the Duchess, not having visited her estates this year, but preferring the *séjour* of Paris to that of her son's château in the Mayenne, had constantly written communications to attend to, from farmers and tenants, and passed half her days at her notary's or solicitor's. She now took leave of Lady Vernon, in order not to miss an appointment with a man of law; but added as she rose :

"I need not carry away Gaston, for he is of no use to me in the affair of to-day. I do not want even his signature."

The Duke, notwithstanding this, insisted upon accompanying his mother along some portion of the road; after which, he begged

Mildred's permission to return : and, the one in her *coupé*, the other on his horse, away went mother and son.

They had been gone about an hour, and Lady Vernon was still intent upon reflecting how beautiful it was to witness Gaston's affection for the Duchess, and thinking it would be very pleasant to be his mother or his sister (she had quite forgotten the news given her by Madame de Montévreux of the Viscount's return), when suddenly a strange noise arrested her attention. It was indistinct, and yet filled her with undefined dread. It came nearer and nearer. What could it be? A tramping of feet, a murmur of voices, a subdued confusion ;—and then a word, a whisper ;—then phrases of horrid import : “ It will be over before that. . . ” “ Carry him up-stairs.”—“ No ! the drawing-room is best.”—“ But then, the blood . . . ”

“ Good Heaven ! ” screamed Lady Vernon, flying to the door ; “ What has happened ? Who is hurt ? ”

She had no time to utter more, for on opening the door, the fearful truth was revealed

to her. Stretched on a rude kind of palliasse, and borne on the arms of rough-clad, uncouth men, lay the apparently lifeless figure of Sir Edward Vernon. His colourless lips were half unclosed; on his brow seemed to stand the damps of death; round the sealed eyes were drawn wide circles of livid blue; and animation appeared for ever to have fled from that limp form and from those pendent arms.

With a shriek of deadly fear, Mildred darted towards the group, unheeding the strange faces that surrounded her; but as she sprung forward, her foot slipped—in blood! Turning faint at this sight, Mildred would have fallen to the ground had it not been for a stout peasant in a blue *blouse*, who caught her in his arms, and supported her, whilst her maid, frightened for ten, and useful to none, stood by, stupidly staring, and wringing her hands.

“*Pauvre petite dame !*” said the man, compassionately. “It is a cruel sight to be sure ! And such an elegant, handsome gentleman ! I’ll bet something they’re only just married—

they look like it ;” continued he, whispering to another labourer who stood near him ; “ Well ! it’s pretty to see two young things like them, so fond of one another—*c’est joli tout d’même !*”

“ Umph !” replied the other, with a glance at Mildred, “ no great merit in being fond of her ! Those that go to the wrong side of the post don’t leave such *mignonnes* as that at home for thieves to come and steal.”

When Lady Vernon recovered herself, she scarcely dared open her eyes ; “ Is he dead ?” asked she with horror.

“ No, no, Madame ! neither dead nor likely to die,” answered, good-naturedly, one of the youngest of the men. “ If he was, the doctor wouldn’t have sent us here without him.”

“ Doctor !” cried Mildred with a start. “ What, is there no doctor here ?”

“ Oh, no ! Madame,” added the same man who had spoken last. “ He is with the other gentleman, who required his attendance much more.”

"And may - be he'll be back here again, directly," muttered another peasant ; "for I don't think *the other* will want him long."

"What other?" asked Mildred faintly.

"M. de Moreton, *Miladi*," said Sir Edward's French valet, in a tone so low as to be only audible to Lady Vernon.

Mildred saw now, and understood the whole.

"How did it happen?" murmured she, shuddering.

The men gave her the details of the duel, which they had observed from a distance. Lady Vernon cast a terrified look towards her husband, and then saw that, from a wound in his right side, the blood oozed out incessantly, and, soaking through the mattress, sent a slow crimson stream upon the pavement of the hall.

"But, Doctor Bertrand!" cried she; "where is he?"

"Colonel Mowbray went to fetch him, *Miladi*," said the valet; "and the other gen-

tleman, whose name I don't know, who was Sir Edward's second *témoin*, went to Annecy to fetch a surgeon who lives there."

The words were scarcely out of the man's mouth, when Doctor Bertrand rushed in, in breathless haste, followed by Madame Fournier, who, forgetting all her reserve, had, the instant she heard of the affair, flown to offer her services, her devotion, to Lady Vernon.

She knew Mildred's position with regard to her husband; but still, she felt that, in the face of such danger—perhaps even of death—resentment, however strong, and however just, must give way to horror and anxiety, if not to actual grief; and that was just Mildred's situation. She was so terror-struck, that she might almost herself have mistaken her apprehension for a warmer sentiment.

When Madame Fournier appeared, Mildred threw herself on her neck, and wept violently. In the meanwhile, Doctor Bertrand had Sir Edward conveyed into the *salon*, and there placed upon a divan. The wound was probed,

and the bullet, imbedded at no great depth in the flesh, extracted.

Doctor Bertrand, after having secured the first bandages, had sought out the kitchen, in order that he might in person superintend the making of some preparation he had ordered. Mildred and Madame Fournier were alone with the wounded man, who, if no longer insensible, was in a state of unconsciousness. Lady Vernon was kneeling by the side of the divan, gazing intently on her husband's pallid features; Madame Fournier was supporting Sir Edward's head upon her hands.

The gallop of a horse was heard in the court, and, before either of them had time to collect their thoughts, the Duc de Montévreux had burst into the apartment, and, flying to Mildred's side—

“What is all this?” he enquired, with a countenance fully expressive of the liveliest emotion; but, before Mildred could answer, or he add more, he started back in amazement. “Heavens!” exclaimed he; “Madame de Bois-lambert!”

Lady Vernon sprang to her feet, and, it must be, I am afraid, confessed, with a look of offended pride singularly misplaced. Madame de Boislambert—for she indeed it was—withdrew her hands, gently deposited her patient's head upon the cushion, and, with a dignified obeisance to Mildred, prepared to leave the room. The shock had so evidently overpowered her, that Mildred almost relented, as she looked upon the deadly paleness that was visible even through the olive-tinted cheek of the Marquise.

The latter had gathered up her bonnet and shawl—her hand was on the door: Mildred paused:—She, who to save Lady Vernon's life had risked her own; she, whose active virtues and whose humble piety Mildred had almost worshipped; she was about to be driven from Mildred's door—a moral outcast! A minute, and it would be too late; a second, and the door would have closed upon the last flutter of her sable dress. Mildred caught the eye of M. de Montévreux intensely fixed upon her.

"Oh! Lady Vernon!" murmured he, with a mixture of reproach and entreaty.

That was all; but Mildred was vanquished. The tone said, "For shame!" but the look said, "For my sake!" and Mildred resisted no more. With one bound she was at the door, and had seized Madame de Boislambert's hand.

"*Restez! Madame la Marquise,*" faltered she. "*Restez, je vous en supplie.*"

Madame de Boislambert, overcome by contending feelings, had sunk upon one knee, and supported herself against a chair. She cast a look at Lady Vernon that would have melted a heart of stone. Mildred hesitated but an instant—and then, opening her arms, raised the humble, shrinking Magdalen at her feet to her embrace. Nay, more! The enraptured Gaston, amid the sobs of the Marchioness, caught the solitary word that fell whispered from Mildred's lips; and that word was "*Pardon!*"

Right! Lady Vernon—right! You have, at length, learnt to be generous, and *not to strike*

the fallen. You have been a better and more virtuous woman within the last ten minutes, than you ever were in your whole life before !

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